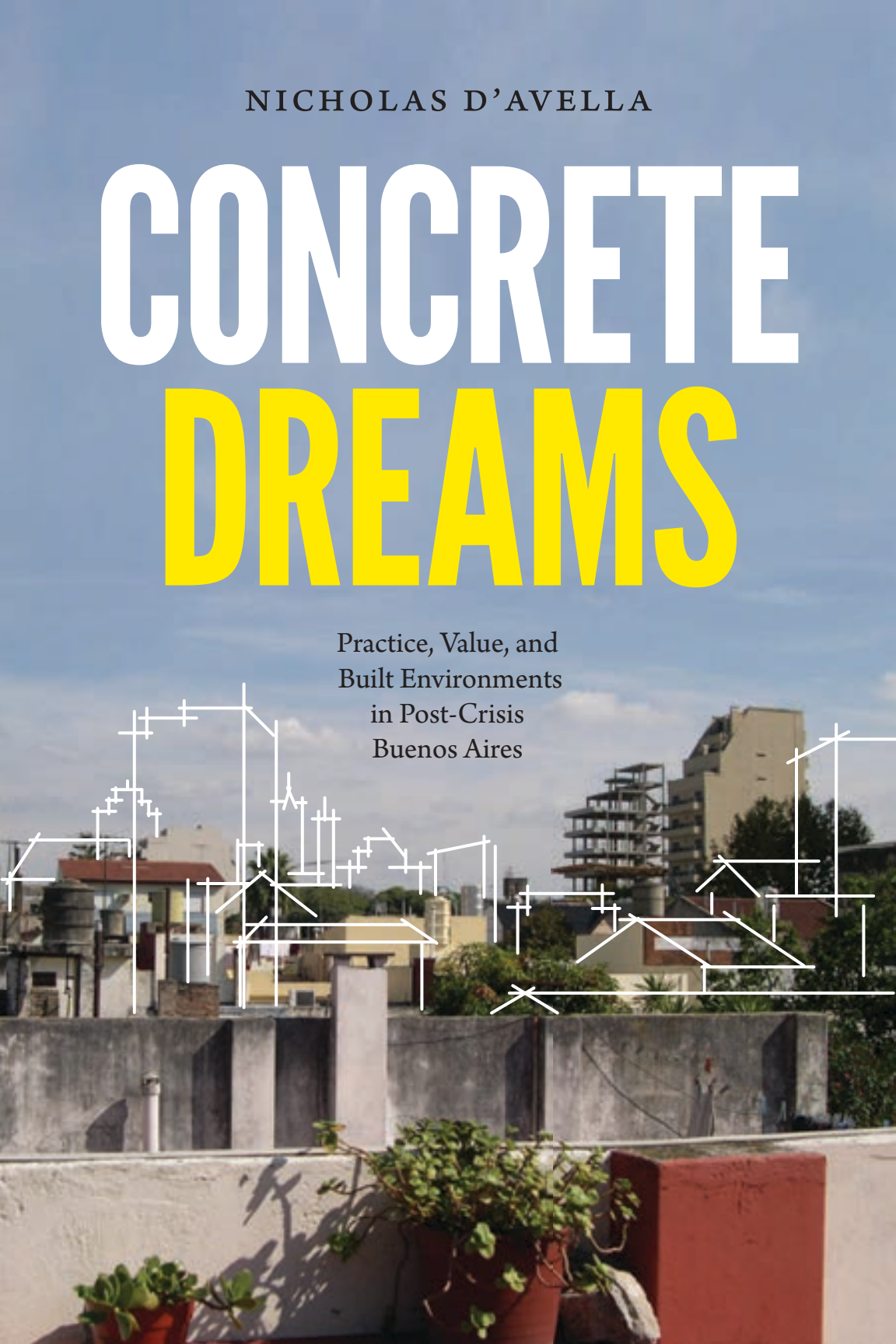
NICHOLAS D'AVELLA

CONCRETE DREAMS

Practice, Value, and Built Environments in Post-Crisis Buenos Aires



CONCRETE DREAMS

Practice, Value, and Built Environments in Post-Crisis Buenos Aires

NICHOLAS D'AVELLA

Duke University Press Durham and London 2019

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Typeset in Arno Pro by Westchester Book Group
Cover design by Drew Sisk

Cataloging-in-Publication is available
from the Library of Congress.
ISBN 978-1-4780-0535-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-4780-0630-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-4780-0511-7 (ebook)

Cover art: The view from a terrace in Villa Pueyrredón.
Photo courtesy of Salvemos al Barrio.

An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared as "Ecologies of Investment: Crisis Histories and Brick Futures in Argentina," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2014): 173–99.
Unless otherwise noted, all English language translations are by the author.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like concrete, this book is the result of a long, slow process of growing together (*concrescere*); like dreams, neither it nor I would have endured without the people, places, and institutions that have helped nurture and sustain us over the years. Thoughtful and generous mentors formed an important part of the environment in which this project was conceived and developed. Marisol de la Cadena continues to offer a fierce set of commitments to ideas, ethnography, and forceful, careful writing that pushed this project beyond where it might otherwise have gone. Don Donham was a constant nurturing presence, always willing to read my work and pose direct, clarifying questions about my writing and thinking. Tim Choy continues to teach me to value subtlety and nuance, and through his presence as a careful reader he has helped me write in a way that feels true. Alan Klima, in addition to teaching me important habits of thought, taught me the rituals of a viable writerly life without which I would not have been able to finish this book.

Many people in Buenos Aires welcomed me into their lives, told me the stories this book is made from, and reflected with me upon the stories of others. Several people active in organizations dedicated to better urban life took me into their meetings and their homes in sometimes vulnerable circumstances in which they did not know whom to trust; I extend my gratitude to the members of Salvemos al Barrio, queremos buenos aires, SOS Caballito, the Asociación Amigos del Lago de Palermo, and the Asociación Vecinal para la Reurbanización del Ex-Autopista 3. I especially thank Osvaldo Guerrica Echevarría, Osvaldo Saredi, Patricia Duró, Ariel Venneri, Abel and Nelly De Grande, Jorge Sardi, Jorge Bobbio, Beatriz Loria, Marta Yantorno, Magdalena Eggers, Edgardo Estrin, Marta Dodero, Mario Oybin, and Miguel Rosengana for guiding me through their barrios and the intricate details of their interactions with

city government. Their tenacity and collective spirit continue to inspire me, and I hope I have done their stories justice.

Various friends put me in touch with family members so that they could share with me intimate details about their finances, including how much, in what forms, and where they kept their money; I am grateful to them for speaking openly with me about private matters. José Rozados, Mario Gomez, Miguel Pato, Damián Tabakman, and Juan Aramburu patiently answered my questions about the Argentine real estate market. Laura Leyt, Darío López, Mariana Yablon, Tristan Dieguez, Hugo Montorfano, Mariana Cardinali, and Pablo Suarez helped me understand the construction industry through their work as architects and builders.

It was a special privilege to spend a year with teachers and students at the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, where fate more than my own good judgment brought me to the Design 1 workshop of the *cátedra* Molina y Vedia–Sorín. Juan Molina y Vedia welcomed me with no questions asked, first into the workshop and years later into his home to listen to him recount, little by little and never in a linear fashion, stories of his life and work; I admire him as a scholar, teacher, and architect with a deep and subtle set of political commitments. The teachers in Design 1 also welcomed me with warmth, humor, and camaraderie. I thank Marta Algañaraz, César Dell'Angelica, Arturo Rovoira, Florencia Marasea, Gabriela Hermida, Deby Díaz Urrutia, Santiago Lanzillota, Juan Pablo Falczuk, Jorge Choque, María Luz Mango, Margarita Kwon, and Alejandro Elena for letting me learn from them and for opening up architectural worlds I hadn't yet dreamed of. Interviews several years later with Jaime Sorín and with the filmmakers of the documentary *70 y Pico*, Mariano Corbacho and Juan Pablo Diaz, helped me pull pieces together.

Close friends in Buenos Aires made fieldwork joyful, keeping my life full of music, literature, food, love, and endless collective reflection on Argentine economics, architecture, politics, and history. Adrián Landeira and Sergio García took me to neighborhoods no one else would take me to, welcomed me into their families and circles of friends, and shared food, songs, television, and political analysis. I was similarly nurtured by Ariel Escalante, Martín de Castro, Pablo Chico, and Pablo Nemec. Francisco Porras, Daniel Chong, Sergio Gorín, Javier Zavaleta, Armando Chanis, Ricky Alderete, and Nadia Quintana kept me laughing and dancing. Guilherme Morais gave me his love and affection. On my first night in Buenos Aires I met Florencia Fragasso, Julián Massaldi, Bárbara Panico, Esteban Magnani, and Sabrina Abran, and they all remain close friends and

companions. I especially thank Flor for sharing poetry and literature with me on the many afternoons we shared in Buenos Aires' historic cafes, including a copy of Daniel Durand's *El cielo de Boedo*. Babette Wielenga, Brendan Martin, and Lauren Szczesny-Pumarada immersed themselves in Buenos Aires with me, and I was always grateful to be able to learn alongside them.

The scholarly endeavors surrounding the production of this book have been similarly touched by many colleagues and friends who offered their support, warmth, and feedback over the years. UC Davis was the place where this project was born and a first draft was written. Michelle Stewart, Chris Kortright, Timothy Murphy, Ingrid Lagos, Bascom Guffin, Diana Pardo Pedraza, Xan Chacko, Jorge Núñez, Camilo Sanz, Vandana Nagaraj, Bettina Ng'weno, Smriti Srinivas, Erin Paszko, Nick Sanchez, Ayesha Nibbe, Kristina Lyons, Lena Meari, Adrian Yen, and Simon Sadler were all present in important ways during these early years (and in many cases for years after). Joe Dumit created a nurturing environment for scholarship that touched many of us. Christiana Giordano offered helpful feedback and advice revising the introduction. Julia Morales Fontanilla opened her home to me on many occasions. Jake Culbertson has been a wonderful companion with whom to hold together architecture and anthropology; he and May Ee Wong offered helpful advice for the revision of chapter 5. I am grateful for all of their companionship and intellectual stimulation.

Cori Hayden has been a generous and supportive mentor since my first postdoc at UC Berkeley. I am grateful to have also enjoyed the company of those surrounding the Center for Science, Technology, Medicine, and Society, especially Harlan Weaver, Christoph Hanssmann, and Hélène Mialet. Leslie Salzinger, Mila Djordjevic, and William Stafford offered helpful comments on an early version of chapter 1. Mark Fleming, Michael D'Arcy, Milad Odabaei, and Johnathan Vaknin came into my life with friendship and adventure. I returned to New York through a postdoctoral position at The Cooper Union; I thank Bill Germano and my other colleagues for welcoming me there. My two years at Cooper were made especially meaningful by the students I had the privilege of teaching, many of whom touched this work through their curiosity, artistic engagement, and political acuity. My affiliation with the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at NYU has been another important scholarly home in New York. I thank Diana Taylor and Marcial Godoy for providing me with space and a scholarly environment grounded in the artistic and political concerns of the Américas. The incredible group of scholars clustered around the OIKOS working group at the Institute for Public Knowledge (also at NYU) has been a constant source of inspiring engagement. Lily Chumley,

Erica Robles-Anderson, and Caitlin Zaloom foster an environment of care and kinship that permeates and transcends our shared concerns for economic life; they, along with Sarah Muir, Ebony Coletu, Fabio Mattioli, Ainur Begim, and Elizabeth Deluca provided warm support and helpful feedback for various parts of this book. Bruce Grant deserves special thanks for his mentorship. Germán Garrido, Curt Gambetta, and Abou Farman Farmaian became close friends and intellectual companions.

Other colleagues I met along the way have nurtured the book with their insights and collegial warmth. I first met Daniel Fridman, Ariel Wilkis, and Mariana Luzzi through the Estudios de la Economía collective, organized by José Ossandón; I am grateful to have them as co-thinkers concerned with economic life in Argentina. Taylor Nelms offered feedback on an early version of chapter 1. Andrea Ballestero, Jenna Grant, Natasha Myers, Natalie Porter, and Ivan Small generously shared feedback on different parts of the book. Ignacio Farías, Anders Blok, and Yutaka Yoshinaka helped me think about the politics of voice in urban environments. Eli Elinoff, Smoki Musaraj, Sean Mallin, Georgia Hartman, and Bettina Stoetzer offered productive engagements on urban and built environments. Santiago Buraschi helped me think through the work of real estate market analysts, and Sebastián Malecki provided helpful feedback regarding the politics of architectural education in Argentina. Gary McDonogh was my teacher in the interdisciplinary program in the Growth and Structure of Cities as an undergraduate at Haverford College; I don't think this project would have come about without my exposure to the ideas I learned there. Marcos Mendoza, Sean Brotherton, Lilly Irani, Sarah Besky, Jerome Whittington, Fred Wherry, Pablo Ben, and Emily McDonald have offered support along the way. The community of writers at Academic Muse talked me through innumerable blockages and dilemmas over the years. I also thank those colleagues who engaged with my work through talks given at MIT and the University of Chicago's Anthropology departments; Princeton University's School of Architecture; the Institute for Sustainable Design at Cooper Union; and at NYU, St. Olaf College, Bryn Mawr College, and Haverford College.

Fieldwork for this book was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the Fulbright Program. An Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/American Council of Learned Societies dissertation completion grant allowed me time to write the book's first iteration. Balanced postdoctoral positions at UC Berkeley and The Cooper Union enabled me to make steady progress toward the book, and a Hunt Postdoctoral Fellowship

from the Wenner-Gren Foundation allowed me to finish it. I am grateful to these institutions for their support.

Gisela Fosado, my editor at Duke University Press, supported the project with warmth and encouragement. Mark Healey and Cassie Fennell read the first version of the manuscript in its entirety and offered the kind of generous, deeply engaged feedback a writer dreams of. I thank them (and an anonymous reviewer who read a revised version) for guiding the book to its present form.

I also thank my mother, Laura, my sister Joanna, and my late father, John, as well as the rest of my family for their love, for encouraging me to follow the paths I felt were right for me, and for supporting me when those paths were difficult. Vernon Caldwell, Samuel Pinilla, Joshua Hiller, Shamus Khan, Diego Ellerman, Julio Ponce, Chris Cornell, Laura Goorin, John Welch, Jorge Piñero, and Garland Godfrey are a constant source of loving and supportive kinship.

I have written this book in the close presence of colleagues and friends who either sat literally across the table from me in cafés or, when work and life took us far from one another, in virtual proximities that allowed us to work together despite the distance. Along the way they read drafts, talked me out of tough spots, and helped me know when to hold tight to something and when to let it go; we laughed together, thought together, and grew together. Vivian Choi has been with me since our first day of graduate school and has been a constant source of shared thinking, laughter, and companionship. Rima Praspaliauskiene has reflected with me on various versions of most of this book. Mark Robinson has gotten deep into my head, often to help me get out of it. Jerry Zee helped me find my way deeper into some dense moments. Rossio Motta, Jonathan Echeverri Zuluaga, Stefanie Graeter, Aaron Norton, and Martine Lappé urged me on, both with ideas and with joyful copresence. I am humbled by how generous they have been with their thoughts and with their hearts.

Yo tengo tantos hermanos
Que no los puedo contar
En el valle, la montaña
En la pampa y en el mar

I have so many brothers
That I can't count them
In the valley, the mountain
On the plains and in the sea

Cada cual con sus trabajos
Con sus sueños, cada cual
Con la esperanza adelante
Con los recuerdos detrás

Each one with their work
With their dreams, each one
With hope before them
With memories behind

Yo tengo tantos hermanos
Que no los puedo contar

I have so many brothers
That I can't count them

—from the folksong "Los Hermanos" (1969), by ATAHUALPA YUPANQUI

INTRODUCTION

Concrete Dreams

Mariela straps 50,000 dollars to her body and those of her brothers, who will accompany her from her bank to that of the seller. There, the U.S. banknotes will be meticulously inspected and counted and change hands. When it's done, Mariela will have converted her dollars into "bricks"—Argentine shorthand for real estate—and will own an apartment. Mariela is no stranger to conversion. Before her savings became dollars, they existed as dollar-equivalent pesos, trapped in her bank account by government edict in 2001 and later devalued. As soon as she could, she got her diminished stack of pesos out of the bank and converted them to dollars to shelter them from inflation. Now, she was converting them again: into an apartment worth dollars, but located in Buenos Aires. Mariela thinks back to an illustration she saw in a news article on real estate, in which hundred-dollar bills were stacked like bricks in the form of a house. She smiles despite her nerves and thinks that the cartoony image feels particularly real in this moment. Her plans for the future remain vague: she thinks that one day her son might use the apartment, and in the meantime it could provide some rental income for her family. She is nervous, but is also fairly certain this was the best decision she could have made in an economic environment that felt even more complicated than usual.

Bárbara leans forward in her stool, bringing her face close to the drawings of the cultural center she's been working on for weeks. She rubs her eyes. She knows that she's included all the required elements for her first major assignment in architecture school: the main multipurpose room, a small kitchen, two restrooms, and a

storage space. She tries to project herself into the building she has drawn, like her teachers have taught her. In her mind, she looks out the window she's drawn and is pleased with the view of the park she imagines there—a result of how she oriented the building and where she had placed the main room relative to the others. She's less convinced by her placement of the bathrooms, which she's tried out in a dozen different places. She's pretty sure her teacher won't like her solution, but she couldn't find a better placement for them on her own. Only at the very edge of Bárbara's consciousness are the set of events that gripped both the nation and the architecture school almost forty years earlier, when leftist architects gained control of the university at a moment of sharp political upheaval in Argentina. Their struggles are part of the reason that she—a young woman from a family of modest means—is able to attend one of the country's most esteemed universities to study architecture. Nor is she focused on the ways that this particular assignment—to design a cultural center in a marginal neighborhood of the city, beyond the usual geographies of money and architectural engagement—is grounded in a set of pedagogic commitments bound up with those same political events. But still, this history is in some way present for her: every day she passes under a banner in the main atrium of the architecture school that bears the faces of students and faculty disappeared by a military dictatorship for whom the political commitments engrained in leftist architectural pedagogy embodied a vital threat to the order of things. Those dead were, in ways that were sometimes more apparent than others, somehow still with her.

.....

On the other end of the city, Patricia ducks under her drying laundry to water the plants on her rooftop terrace—one of her daily rituals that brings her a little peace in the middle of a hectic life. She closes her eyes and feels the spring sun warm her face. The sound of traffic on the avenue is muted here. She breathes in a bit of the morning breeze. Then she opens her eyes and turns to face the new buildings that stretch up into the sky behind her. She feels as if she can reach out and touch them. The days are starting to get longer, and she reckons she'll have sun on the terrace for another few hours before it slips behind the new building and things become several shades darker and several degrees cooler. She looks at her plants. Some of them are doing fine, others seem to be wanting for the sun they used to have. The building is almost finished, its glass glimmering more sharply alongside the greening cement of her own aging apartment building. She looks up at the balconies of her future neighbors, rising above her terrace. What will they be like? Will they smile down on her and wave? Will they complain about the

smoke from her barbecue drifting into their apartments? She lightly hums a tango about love and loss, set, as tangos often are, in the grimy streets of a humble urban world that feels at once distant and familiar to her. Back downstairs, she rifles through some of the papers she had promised to go over before her meeting that night with a small group of people from the neighborhood. It had been several months since she received the flier in her mailbox that called people together to figure out what to do about the new buildings going up all over the barrio. The group thought that her work as a secretary in a real estate broker's office might give her a leg up in understanding the world of requirements and regulations embodied in the Código de Planeamiento Urbano, *or Urban Planning Code, which they had asked her to study, but the truth was she felt as lost as everyone else. Still, the meeting with one of the few legislators who had paid any attention to their complaints was coming up, and they needed to be ready.*

.....

This book is a sustained ethnographic reflection about a set of practices concerning buildings and the ways they operate as quotidian points of refraction for divergent politics of value in Argentina at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is a book about the intricate, close registers in which buildings and their value are engaged, worked over, and remade—registers that are neither separate from, nor simple instantiations of, the wider fields of which they are a part. Each of the practices I describe are situated within worlds marked by variegated terrains of knowledge, history, and power—worlds that practitioners work to reformulate through quotidian, minor forms of action and intervention. They draw worlds into their practices and, in doing so, also remake them. Their practices are at once intimate, familiar, and small, but in their way, also eventful and expansive.

Value, as I use it in this book, is a concept that includes, but also exceeds, what is captured by the category of the economic. Think back to the three moments I offered earlier. Mariela is investing in a building to secure an economic future. She cares about what the apartment might be worth today and whether that might change in the future. Bound up with those concerns are questions about her own life and those of her children and what they might be like in the years to come. Bárbara, the architecture student, values buildings as well, in part as the means through which she will gain her livelihood, to be sure. But it is also part of the art she is learning, a refined sensibility about how to foster good human life in built environments. She is learning to care about the kind of light that enters a room, about the views one has through

the widows, about how people practice quotidian tasks. Patricia, too, probably cares about how much her apartment is worth and certainly cares about the light and air. But she does so in a different way, through everyday practices of plant cultivation, cooking food, hanging out laundry, and spending time with those close to her, practices inflected through more widely shared cultural registers like the tango she hums. In this book, I am interested in the ways that different practices cultivate different kinds of value in buildings—forms of value that can include, but are not limited to, market value.[1]

Practice is a term I use to attend to the situated, historically constituted, material-semiotic environments in which buildings are engaged and worked on. From their inception and throughout their lives, buildings are distributed through the charts and graphs of market analysts, the drawings and models of architectural designers, the urban planning code of the city government, and the everyday life practices of neighborhood residents and the narrative forms they deploy to reflect upon them. None of these forms of engagement are simply at the disposal of practitioners who can take them up and put them down at will; rather, they are lively, integrated features of how practitioners know and engage their world.[2] Bárbara's care for buildings is not anterior to her ability to draw, for example; rather, she learns to value them in her particular way by drawing, just as Mariela does through the newspapers she reads and the dollars she straps to her and her brothers' bodies, or as Patricia does through the food she cooks on her terrace, the tango she hums, the plants she cares for. In this sense, practices are the domains of subjects who are unthinkable without the specific means through which they engage their world; these forms of engagement are an integral part of what makes an architect an architect and what makes architects different from investors, analysts, state planners, and neighborhood residents. They are central to the quotidian contexts and endeavors in which buildings are relevant to and valued by each group of practitioners. They reach into bodies and minds to help practitioners think, imagine, do, and feel in certain ways, but also impose certain obligations and requirements on them.[3]

Implicit in these distinct forms of engagement are particular ways of defining what a good building is or should be. These particular forms of value are woven through the historically developed, sociotechnical practices through which buildings are known and made. The set of practices through which Mariela engages her apartment—the physical dollars, the news article she thinks of—opens up a different set of questions and allows for the manifestation of different kinds of value than the drawings and models that Bárbara ponders over or the tango Patricia hums on her terrace. The tools of practice are

not, therefore, value-neutral; instead, they help form the quotidian contexts in which buildings are valued and evaluated. This means that the kinds of value that different practitioners hold in buildings are not anterior to the practices through which they engage them, but rather are constructed through them. Far from abstract values operating in a realm of ideal immateriality, the values practitioners hold in buildings are bound up with material forms of engagement that extend far beyond brick and mortar. To speak of practices and value together, then, is to speak about differences that go beyond opinion, but are embedded in the particular means through which buildings are engaged.

Approaching value through practices also helps deepen and extend attention to the ways that values are made real in the world as part of broadly shared processes that sprawl across time and geography. Mariela's practice brings buildings into relation with a world of dollars, pesos, and bank accounts, and by extension with the particular historical dynamics of global currency exchange and transnational banking. Bárbara's pencil and paper, her floor plans and elevations, connect buildings with histories of cultivated architectural expertise and a way of thinking about and relating to the built environment developed over centuries in far-flung points across the globe. And Patricia's plants, the spaces of the building she lives in, the tango lyrics, and the urban planning code she pores over unite her own quotidian experience with realms of law, urban planning, state power, and metropolitan culture that extend far beyond her terrace. At the same time, none of these are simple exemplars of the wider sets of practices of which they are a part. Economic investment, architecture, and neighborhood life do not operate in the same way in Buenos Aires as they do in any other part of the world. Rather, they are situated in particular histories that may converge with related practices at some moments and diverge from them at others.[4] Mariela's purchase of an apartment may have something in common with real estate investors in other parts of the world, but it is also situated in an economic history replete with crises that sets her practice apart from others; Bárbara's architectural education was significantly impacted by the country's political history, including efforts to reform architectural education in line with the needs of a poor, peripheral country and violent purges of faculty and students under dictatorships; similarly, Patricia's relationship with her terrace and her neighborhood group's political advocacy unfold in the particular cultural history of neighborhood life, urban planning, and city politics in Buenos Aires.

There is a lesson to be drawn here from the peculiar materiality of concrete. While concrete is said to be the most widely used building material in

the world, concrete is not just one material—not exactly. Concrete is a *material compuesto*, or compound material: a material composed of other materials, namely a combination of Portland cement, water, and stone aggregate. The purported oneness of concrete can be troubled still further when one considers that both the water and the rocky aggregate are typically drawn from sites close to construction, producing local specificities. For example, a special issue on concrete in the architectural supplement of a major Argentine newspaper explains that "the use of granitic sand in the center of the province of Buenos Aires produces concretes that are rougher and more difficult to work with compared to those that use riverine sands, whose particles are smoother," and that "concrete's elasticities differ depending on whether the rocks used are granitic, quartzose, silicose, basaltic, or lime" (Becker 2008). In other words, no concrete is exactly like any other—a difference tied closely to geographic forms of emplacement, the terrains from and on which it is built. Concrete both spans the globe and at the same time is deeply emplaced. As a compound material, concrete is thus both more than one thing and less than many things, to think along the lines used by Donna Haraway (1991) to describe the cyborg and Marilyn Strathern (2004) to describe Melanesian personhood: a non-unit composed of incommensurable entities, existing in a way difficult to think through the analytical dualism of singularity and multiplicity (see de la Cadena 2015, 31).[5]

Thinking from the particularities of concrete as a compound material suggests ways that anthropology might push concrete's aggregates beyond even those of water, rock, and cement to deepen attention to buildings' divergent manifestations across a range of practices. Consider again the forms in which buildings appeared in the vignettes I offered earlier: an illustration in a newspaper article, the drawing of an architecture student, a place for plants and barbecues and looking at the sky, the lines of an urban planning code, the lyrics of a tango. In this book I argue that these, too, are part of concrete's compound materiality. Working through practice displaces major-key materialisms predicated on global forms and, instead, fosters practices of attention that stay with the particular. When approached through practices, buildings' materiality becomes fractal and distributed. So, too, does their value.

"Concrete dreams" is the concept tool that this book develops to speak to the intertwined relationship between value and practice, between dreams about concrete (particular aspirations for buildings and what they could and should be) and the concrete forms in which those dreams are articulated. With my oxymoronic concept, I seek in part to unsettle the ways social theory

has often simultaneously sanctified and relegated concrete to a place of the really real, in which it stands as the other to ideas, imagination, and dreams. William James offers an alternative to this formulation when he observes that "thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are" (1996, 37; see Shaviro 2009, 21). Like thoughts, dreams have concrete forms, too. Drawings, graphs, stories, and codes embody both dreams for buildings' futures and the media in which those dreams are worked out in the world. Considering them part of concrete's compound materiality marks the extent to which dreams about buildings are permeated and sustained by material forms of engagement, nudging dreams out of a realm of ideal immateriality to instead ask how they are composed in the presence of things, the stuff of practice. At the same time, it works to trouble the apparently settled, unified realness often imputed to the concrete to instead hold close the ways that diverse forms of material practice are imbued with hopes, aspirations, and possibility.

Concrete dreams are not only representations that reflect already existing ideas or states of affairs. As the forms of engagement through which possibilities are produced and in which they live, they do things in the world. The dreams I speak of, then, are not the opposite of action, and much less of politics. Jacques Rancière, in *The Distribution of the Sensible*, has observed that "politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions,' that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done. . . . They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making" (Rancière 2004, 39, emphasis in original; see also Rancière 2010). Just as Rancière finds in art and politics the material rearrangements of signs and images that construct relations between what is and what could be, so too are concrete dreams material practices through which modes of being, saying, and doing are reconfigured to craft possible worlds. Concrete dreams thus blur the lines between the actual and the possible and forge potential realities poised to recraft the contours of shared worlds.[6] They are political in the sense that they build out divergent forms of value in the world—values that exist in the presence of others, and often in tension with them. In working with models, graphs, stories, and codes, the practitioners in this ethnography are asking fundamental questions about what buildings are and might become. Not all of their dreams will be realized as buildings, but they remain present, poised to inflect those that do come into being. The book's central argument is that it is through these concrete dreams—dreams articulated in

paper and PowerPoints, cardboard and stories—that divergent visions about the value of buildings are held in tension across partially shared urban worlds.

.....

The stories I tell in this book are grounded in a construction boom that unfolded over the course of ten years following a major economic and political crisis in Argentina in 2001 (I return to these events in more detail shortly). The boom took place in a post-crisis economic and political environment in which questions of value were an important axis of debate. Among the many things evoked by the crisis was a broad rethinking of the economic logics that underwrote the neoliberal reforms that were implemented throughout the 1990s, when widespread privatizations and the installation of free-market logics were a guiding principle of governance. The crisis provoked a popular reexamination of these ideas, but not only in ways relevant to questions of state economic policy. In the post-crisis reexamination of and skepticism about markets, I see the development of a powerful political sensibility attentive to conflicting forms of value. In the years after the crisis, the importance of figuring out how to get and hold onto economic stability and well-being were lost on no one. At the same time, struggles to trouble market value's place as the hegemonic definition of what matters seemed ever more relevant: there was a sense that the country had lost its way in the 1990s, drunk on a cocktail of privatization and free markets, and people seemed ready to look for a different path to the construction of viable futures.

The events and sensibilities that came to the fore during and after the crisis had deep and expansive roots: they redounded upon earlier historical epochs in Argentina while resonating with contemporaneous experiments throughout the region to carve new, more inclusive paths beyond neoliberalism. The first decade of the twenty-first century was a time of great transformation in Latin America, one that witnessed a turn to the left in the political leadership of countries across the region that centered, among other things, on the rejection of neoliberal policies and the search for other paths toward collective well-being. Post-crisis Argentina was part of this moment. This book and the political impetus that sustains it are inseparable from this time in Argentina, which some have called post-neoliberal and others have called the *decada ganada*—the decade gained or won, as in won back from a history heavy with dispossession—a decade in which important changes were afoot that had little truck with the promissory futures offered by neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus.

How the practices of people like Mariela, Bárbara, and Patricia—and the values produced by them—articulate with these major-key historical moments is part of my concern in this book. My method is to historically situate practices: in bodies, in tools, and in political and economic life. Throughout the book I track between close, intimate encounters with buildings and the more epochal events that have helped define these practices and to which practitioners seek to respond. Mariela, Bárbara, and Patricia make manifest in the world divergent, and often precarious, forms of value. I am interested in how buildings were made into new kinds of economic objects after the crisis and how sets of practice that produce and depend upon other forms of value—like those of architecture and neighborhood life in Buenos Aires—were made to endure in the face of buildings' increasingly central place in Argentine economic life. What could buildings become—of what transformations would they be capable and engender—in these post-crisis economic and political atmospheres?

The construction boom was a moment that pressed upon a set of disagreements about what buildings are for and therefore what they are. Ranciére has described disagreement as not just the conflict between one who says "white" and another who says "black," but as "the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it" (Ranciére 1999, x). I think of buildings in a similar way, as embodying conflicts between one who says "building" and another who says "building" but does not understand the same thing by it. Buildings became for me the shared terrain on and through which divergent ways of living and knowing cohabit in tension—at times with the full weight of overt contrast, at times barely noticeable beneath apparent agreement. This book is about disagreements over what buildings are and what they could be—and the economic, social, and material means through which these disagreements were lived.

LA CRISIS: MAJOR-KEY HISTORIES

"Welcome to the biggest default in the history
of capitalism!"
From the ass of the world to the head of globalphobia.
In December of 2001, Argentine society went
crack and we all went into limbo.
—Fragment from *¡Crack!* , by MARTÍN KOVENSKY, 2002

In the hot December summer of 2001, street protests erupted in Buenos Aires that overthrew five consecutive presidents in fourteen days. Clashes between protesters and the police and military claimed dozens of lives that summer, as Argentines faced tear gas, rubber bullets, and worse with chants, drums, rocks, and their bodily presence in the streets. This uprising is sometimes referred to as the *argentinazo*, an untranslatable term whose suffix communicates violent collision (a *codazo* is a blow with the elbow, a *cachetazo* a slap in the face). Others simply refer to it as *la crisis*, naming more directly the series of economic events that led to the uprising. Still others, keen to hold present that it was just one crisis in a long history of crises, specify it as *la crisis del 2001*.

The crisis in question followed a decade of neoliberal restructuring in the 1990s, which included a blend of privatization and austerity that drew on a profound faith in free markets as the solution to national economic ills. In Argentina, reforms also included pegging the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar to mitigate the chronic instability of the inflation-prone peso—a move that brought stability to the national currency, but that battered national industries and depended on a near-constant influx of foreign capital, a key source of which was foreign debt.[7] Taking on this debt required implementing structural adjustment policies, a set of economic measures embodied in the neoliberal Washington Consensus: public companies were privatized and sold; protections to local industry were lifted; and social safety nets for the poor and unemployed were dismantled. By the late 1990s, this set of reforms began to see its limits. Growing numbers of poor and unemployed *piqueteros*, or picketers, began to blockade streets in protest. At the same time, the country's debt levels began to creep too high for its creditors' tastes, and the resulting decline in the influx of dollars made dollar-peso convertibility unsustainable. The IMF began to slow the pace of loans, which were the only thing keeping the country and its currency afloat. In the face of near-certain devaluation, money began to flee the banking system, and the government placed sharp restrictions on bank withdrawals. The restrictions drew a large cross section of Argentine society into the streets, where they joined poor piqueteros in protest. As liberal economists and politicians continued to call for increased austerity in the interest of servicing the escalating foreign debt, the street protests forced the elected president and several appointed replacements to resign. Weeks later, the peso was unpegged from the dollar and devalued, and Argentina announced the largest sovereign debt default in the history of the world.

Interpreters of capitalism, globalization, colonialism, and politics would come to read many histories and many futures through Argentina and the

crisis of 2001. Like many crises, this one was a kind of overdetermined moment in which relations of all sorts would unravel and become questioned.[8] Martín Kovensky, in his visual and poetic diary of 2002, called this time a limbo, a liminal time in which a series of contradictions at the heart of Argentina's history and position in the world were brought into stark relief. Argentina's very name, he observes, comes from *argentum*, silver, or *plata*, a word for money. With irony, he notes that the country, founded on contraband trade in colonial times, later becoming one of the breadbaskets of the world, had been transformed into a place in which people were starving. In the book, a collage made from fragments of shredded pesos shows money dripping out like tears or blood from Argentina, falling off the edges of the earth (see figure 1.1).

The spectacular nature of the crisis placed Argentina at the center of a series of debates about neoliberalism that extended well beyond Argentina. In the 1990s, the country had been held aloft as one of the great success stories of what could happen when states submit to the tutelage of the institutions of the Washington Consensus to reorganize fiscal, monetary, and trade policy around free markets. If Argentina had been a poster child for neoliberalism before the crisis, the country's unraveling was held aloft by critics on the left as a defining moment through which to consider neoliberalism's failures and to reflect on the intertwined histories of colonialism and empire that underwrote neoliberal reforms. The crisis secured Argentina's place as a potent symbol of capitalism's disastrous expansion and as a key site for the analysis of financial extractivism masquerading as a development model by promising to leverage the power of free markets to improve people's lives. Intellectuals on the left were captivated by the popular revolt of the argentinazo and leveraged the rampant poverty and urban barter economies brought about by the crisis—shocking in one of the most developed countries of Latin America—as a cautionary tale about neoliberalism.[9]

With the argentinazo, Argentina became cast as something of a vanguard for the left, bearing promise for new directions in economic and political life as part of a Latin America lauded as "the first region of the world in which popular struggles, votes, and new policies manifested a refusal of the imperialist neoliberal order" (Duménil and Lévy 2011, 324). The popular revolt provided a beacon of hope for a world in which the hegemony of free markets seemed to have an iron-tight grip: events in Argentina carried the promise of a different future, embodied in a flourish of direct-democracy neighborhood assemblies, cooperative takeovers of factories by workers, and solidarity economies that

FIGURE I.1. *Map 1,* by Martín Kovensky. Drawing and shredded pesos.

unfolded in the wake of the crisis. Together, they offered signs of resilience and creativity in the face of global capitalism, experiments in new ways of living that were gritty and stark, but at the same time brimming with utopian potential.

In 2003, following two years of interim governments, elections were held and Nestor Kirchner began his term as president. His administration, together with the two-term presidency of his wife and political partner, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, would seek to chart a path beyond neoliberalism. The crisis had served to strip markets of the patina of rationality and self-regulation that neoliberal policies had attributed to them; faith in *el modelo*—the model of the 1990s, in which markets provided rational and efficient solutions to the nation's ills—seemed shaken to the core.[10] The crisis was, in this sense, a moment in which taken-for-granted ideas were cast open and subject to collective interrogation, a moment inhabited with anxiety and irresolution, but also shared concern and the possibility of building a different world. In the decade that followed, the postal service, the national airline, the water company, and the former state oil company were all renationalized, social services were expanded, and protective trade policies that prioritized national production rather than ideals of global free markets were implemented.

In his inauguration speech, Kirchner reflected on the events leading up to the crisis through a series of epochal moments that are touchstones in Argentina's broadly shared historical lexicon (see text box). He prominently recalled the generation of leftist political activists disappeared by the country's last dictatorship in the mid-1970s and early 1980s—itself an early moment of neoliberal restructuring—and characterized the rest of the 1980s as a time focused on restoring democratic normalcy to a country marked by interruptions in democratic rule and the ongoing search for truth and justice for the disappeared. In the 1990s, he said, priorities turned to economic growth and stability, but they followed a neoliberal recipe that turned a blind eye to the inequality caused by economic restructuring. Reflecting on epochs of neoliberal dictatorship and neoliberal democracy, Kirchner sought with his presidency to bring democracy and economic development into a new kind of relationship: to "initiate a new time, one that finds us shoulder to shoulder in the struggle to achieve progress and social inclusion." His speech featured a now-famous refrain: *vengo a proponerles un sueño*—I come to propose to you a dream. "I come to propose to you a dream," he said, "to rebuild our own identity as a people and as a nation. I come to propose to you a dream, which is the construction of truth and justice. I come to propose to you a dream, of returning to an Argentina with all and for all. I come to propose that we

There were things Kirchner did not need to explain to those listening to his speech: defining moments in Argentina's broadly shared historical lexicon. They included key moments that continued to resonate with ongoing struggles over the intertwined relationship between political and economic life in the wake of the crisis. I offer a brief set of keywords for those unfamiliar with these histories.

Peronism

The rise of Peronism in the 1940s is a major historical touchstone in Argentine history. At the time, Argentina was one of the most heavily industrialized and prosperous countries in Latin America, but with a prosperity that was very unequally distributed. The ways this prosperity was accumulated and distributed underwent important changes through populist-inflected, import-substitution economic policies of Juan Domingo Perón, who had risen to prominence under a military government and was then elected president in 1946. Between 1946 and 1955, Perón, together with his wife Evita, implemented a host of programs favorable to the working classes, consolidating a place in the political imaginary of the country that is difficult to overstate. Alongside import-substitution, Perón nationalized the railways and public utilities, many of which were owned by foreign firms; inscribed worker's rights, including the right to work, to universal health care, and to retirement benefits, into the national constitution; and oversaw a sharp increase in real wages for the working classes.

Perón was overthrown by a military coup in 1955.[11] Between 1955 and 1973, the country was governed by a series of military governments, punctuated by brief periods of civilian rule. These years bore witness to an escalating struggle between competing factions of an increasingly polarized country. This included struggles over Perón's own legacy between leftist and conservative factions within Peronism. The former organized around worker's rights and was associated with efforts to move the country further along a path toward socialism, while the latter consolidated around a populist, anticommunist, Catholic nationalism linked with more conservative, authoritarian trade unionism. By the beginning of the 1970s, popular unrest, including escalating violence between military regimes and worker's movements, led to broad advocacy for free and unrestricted elections (Peronism had been prohibited from running candidates in the few elections held since 1955). Perón returned from exile and was once again elected president.[12] He died less than a year later, and his wife Isabel took over the presidency (his second and most famous wife, Evita, had died in 1952), only to be overthrown by another military regime.

Dictatorship

Between 1976 and 1983, the country was ruled by a famously brutal military government that assassinated and disappeared over 30,000 Argentines and ushered in a sweeping liberalization of the national economy. Wages were frozen, prices were deregulated, trade barriers protective of Argentine industry were dropped, and new financial laws were implemented that facilitated speculative foreign investment. These changes to economic policy would later be identified as some of the earliest global experiments with neoliberal economic policy, together with similar policies introduced by military regimes in Chile and Brazil under the tutelage of U.S. economists, most famously the Chicago Boys.

Neoliberalism

Argentina returned to democracy in 1983, but the president, Alfonsín, inherited from the dictatorship a battered national economy.[13] Amid an economic scenario of hyperinflation and general instability that seemed impossible to turn around, Alfonsín stepped down in 1989 to allow his successor to take office early. This president would institute sweeping neoliberal reforms throughout the 1990s under the tutelage of the IMF, reforms that were in many ways a deepening of the dictatorship-era economic policies of the late 1970s. After nearly ten years of apparent economic stability, things fell apart, and the events of the crisis unfolded. To this day, many consider even saying this president's name bad luck—the kind that causes major national economies to come crashing down. Instead, they call him Méndez (which is not his name, but sounds like it) or *el innombrable*, the Unnamable.

When Nestor Kirchner was elected president in 2003, the country seemed ready to reconsider the place of free markets and other neoliberal ideas in the construction of a more promising collective future. In placing equity and collective well-being at the front of policy agendas, both supporters and detractors found echoes of Perón's legacy decades earlier. Perón, dictatorship, neoliberalism, and what came after: these histories and the ways they fold over and reflect upon one another are parts of the wider frames of historical memory to which I will return throughout this book.

remember the dreams of our founding patriots, of our immigrant grandparents and pioneers, and of our own generation, which put everything on the line in order to build a country of equals."

Kirchner's dream was a big, epochal moment that focused on major, epochal transitions. It incorporated historical memory with a dream for the future articulated in the major key of politics, economics, and national progress. In this, it had something in common with the analyses of world-historical capitalist development captured in academic and left-political considerations of Argentina and what they tell us about intertwined histories and futures of capitalism, colonialism, and democratic politics. It was also bound up, in its own way, with reflections like those of Kovensky, who, in his visual and poetic diary of 2002, includes mass-media images of scenes shared with a nation during the crisis's long unfolding. But alongside these scenes, Kovensky's book also offers us others, including unremarkable subway scenes and close-up images of the plants on his balcony. Crisis, while an event that names an epochal moment, can also be made to intertwine itself across registers, binding the epochal to the everyday.

MAJOR AND MINOR KEYS: ECOLOGIES OF PRACTICE AND VALUE

What does it mean to think about everyday practices of economic investment, neighborhood life, or architectural pedagogy in the presence of the grand epochal moments of Argentine history that Kirchner laid out in his speech and that are a prime register of academic analysis regarding Argentina? How do the practices surrounding buildings matter alongside these more epochal concerns? Inspired by a set of the questions grounded in analyses of neoliberalism, capitalist expansion, and the violent suppression of alternative ways of organizing economic and political life, I nevertheless take a slightly different approach than one that grounds its analytic in these registers. I do so in the interest of opening up a series of questions about the politics of value. Let me explain.

Neoliberalism, capitalism, and imperialism are analytical frames typically deployed to characterize a set of global, epochal transformations in capitalist expansion and its relationship with forms of governance and with certain modes of subjectivity. The goal, when working in these registers, is to draw out and lay bare a set of general processes through which to understand a more particular series of events. These analytical frames are important. They

allow us to find connections across what may be broadly shared processes and in their best moments open the possibility for alliance and resistance across a variety of apparently discrete situations. Such was Marx's (1990) goal in theorizing capital as a grounds through which workers of the world might unite in common struggle. More recently, Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) have imagined a multitude that would come together in a global alliance against the forces of empire. Nestor Kirchner, in outlining the threats posed by dictatorship to democratic politics and by neoliberalism to broadly shared economic inclusion, was after something similar: to unite Argentines in the interest of building a more promising and just future. In these scholarly and political registers, finding alternative paths to capitalism and empire is approached through the critique of general processes on the one hand and the formation of an alternative, synthetic analytic on the other.

For others, this is not the only path. The attractive side of propositions in these registers is that they can be clearly read into epochal and globally resonant political struggles. But as with all analytical frames, working from this perspective can obscure other possible inroads into a problem and indeed other problems altogether. I worry that in such frames the minor forms of value produced through the practices of people like Mariela, Bárbara, and Patricia find little space to breathe alongside general processes that are taken to be both encompassing of them and more important than them. Their practices become either exemplars of, or footnoted exceptions to, processes that are presumed to be what really matters.

Here, I find it useful to think with a distinction drawn by Isabelle Stengers between what she calls major and minor keys. Intellectual work in what she calls a major key focuses on the production of general theoretical knowledge, drawing on but also abstracting from particular cases and contexts. As an example of working in the major key, she offers a line from Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*, in which they state that their aim is to "identify a theoretical schema that puts the subjectivity of the social movements at centre stage in the process of globalization and the constitution of global order" (2004). The value they place on the center stage and the production of an alternative world order situates Hardt and Negri in a major key, Stengers argues. Against more frightening major-key stories—like those that imagine capitalism as the natural progression of human history—this is certainly a more promising one. But it also gives pause to those of us interested in ongoing projects of difference that may enter less easily into major-key thinking or to those of us hesitant about the constitution of global orders.

In contrast, Stengers describes thinking with practices as work in a minor key. In a minor key, "no theory gives you the power to disentangle something from its particular surroundings, that is, to go beyond the particular towards something we would be able to recognize and grasp in spite of particular appearances" (2005a). She calls this, following Deleuze, thinking *par le milieux*, or "with the surroundings."[14] Keeping the surroundings of a practice present means that rather than working from (or toward) a transcendent, overarching explanatory framework, one pays attention to the specific sets of requirements and obligations practitioners produce and confront in their work. Practitioners' milieus are social and political, but also technical, affective, and embodied, including diverse competencies, sensory forms, and material tools. Working in a minor key does not negate the relevance of broadly (but always partially) shared processes, but it does recast their relationship such that the latter do not become major or general in a way that is given the power to cancel the specific—not given the power, to use Stengers' words again, to be disentangled from, or to function in spite of, particular appearances.[15]

Working in a minor key raises a series of methodological and analytical entailments that I take up in this book. One challenge that I concern myself with is to find a place for the everyday that avoids falling into scalar dichotomies in which general phenomena are taken to encompass—either analytically or spatially—situated phenomena. To move beyond, in other words, the perception that an architectural student learning to draw is somehow contained within and explained by something like neoliberalism or capitalism or is best understood as a case (either exemplary or exceptional) in the analytical service of a more general category. In considering an architecture student hunched over a drawing in the university alongside epochal registers of political economy, which picture is the "big picture"? Or is this relationship between big and small, container and contained, general and particular, theory and empirical evidence not something itself that deserves rethinking—something that is perhaps an artifact of a certain analytical perspective? For me, asking how these practices can be relevant without being subordinated to master categories is a question as relevant to politics as it is to our ethnographic imagination.

These are not new problems in anthropology. While many anthropologists find in Western categories of critique the vital grounds through which to approach enduring challenges in global politics, others have expressed concern over the application of more general analytical frames, especially in light of post-structuralist developments in the field.[16]

My own stake in working in the minor key grew out of a growing dissatisfaction with the possibilities offered by intellectual and political work carried out in a major key. I spent the first several years of my graduate work heavily invested in Marxist analyses of global political economy, the commodity form, and the kinds of subjectivities and governmentalities that capitalism depends on and helps to produce. I remain invested in the desire for a better and more just world that underscores these analytical projects. But I found that major-key thinking often served to shut down as many possibilities for a better world as it opened up. On the one hand, major-key analytics seemed unable to give real, honest attention to minor projects of worldmaking that, alongside the ongoing march of capitalist expansion, can be made to feel precious at best or barely appear as a blip on the radar. Sweeping, radical breaks come to the fore and are a locus of hope, while practices that break less cleanly can be written off or overlooked. In keeping analysis focused on the "big picture" of major-key processes, minor-key practices can be devalued.[17] This is perhaps especially the case when practices fail to meet the test of a pure resistance from a radical outside. In certain conversations about Argentina, for example, the fires of the argentinazo had barely cooled when some observers were ready to declare attempts to carve a path out of neoliberalism a failure, written off as just another articulation of dominant modes of power carried out with a set of tweaks and dressed up as an alternative. The possibilities some scholars saw in Argentina immediately after the crisis seemed to vanish as quickly as they had appeared: Argentina, despite pretensions to the contrary, was still stuck in neoliberalism after all, and for some the conversation might end there.

My dissatisfaction grew stronger the more time I spent in the field, armed with the toolkit offered by the intellectual practice of critique. Critique is a tool that is very good at finding hegemonic ideas and dominant power structures within everyday frames of action but is less useful at finding the promise and political openings and possibilities that people put into practice, and into the world, every day.[18] What would an analytic look like that could attend to and analytically foster these minor interventions rather than dismiss them as just another part of systems of power that always seemed beyond them? I worried that the tools of critique were inadequate to the actors I was working with in the field, who bore little traces of the kinds of radical alterity and political purity that many critical scholars and political movements find worthy of admiration and attention. This was as true of the neighborhood groups (whose advocacy was, at least at first blush, grounded in private property and

middle-class homeownership) as it was of the architects (bourgeois art!) and real estate investors (capital personified?). How, I asked myself, could we think of possibility in a way that promises something other than clean breaks from existing hegemonic structures of power?

Years later, in the classroom, I felt this dissatisfaction in a different register, as I engaged with politically savvy students primed to the nines with the deconstructive tools of critique. I was struck by how easy it was for them to dismantle texts, political movements, and each other by zooming in on a set of unmarked privileges or ideological failings hidden beneath apparently good intentions. Similarly, conversations about early versions of parts of this book chafed with some audiences, who wanted to hear a stronger critical voice with regard to my subjects: weren't struggles over neighborhood life grounded in a set of class privileges not afforded to, say, residents of shantytowns? Isn't the education of architecture students part of a class-based ideological system from which architects, try as they might, can't really escape? These are good questions. But I worried that there was also an extent to which the questions were coming from a certain critical reflex—a sense that our intellectual project is one of critique and, absent that, an uncertainty about what, if anything, could be said.

This book's focus on practice seeks to sit within the muddied waters of unclean breaks and to foster an analytical practice geared toward minor-key difference and possibility. It is written from the premise that politics takes place in many registers and that minor-key analytical practice is an important way to value and help construct more livable worlds. I am not unconcerned with the epochal ruptures of the crisis, but I am committed to holding this concern present in a way that makes analytical room for the minor-key endurances, quotidian forms of survival, and intimate practices of care that permeate such events. My methodological approach thus seeks in the field minor-key moments in which hegemonic forms of value are placed in tension and attends to the friction of those moments, drawing out some of their entailments as well as the structures through which hegemonic forms maintain their hold. Bracketing some of the pessimistic probabilities offered by critique—that capitalism, in the last instance, wins—for me offers an opportunity to let possibilities stand out in the presence of probabilities.

.....

J. K. Gibson-Graham first taught me to think of capitalism not as a totality, but as a system shot through with other forms of value, and to find in those

forms of value the promise for a different world.[19] Approaching capitalism in this way opens up attention to what they call the "proliferative and desultory wanderings of everyday politics," producing zones of cohabitation and contestation between multiple systems of value (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxi). Thinking about markets as zones of contestation between divergent forms of value means thinking about the tense forms of copresence that partially connect them and to ask how the forms of value they enact are made to endure in the presence of others.

I approach these tense forms of copresence by attending to the ways multiple forms of value sit alongside one another across striated, territorial sets of knowledge and practice.[20] Stengers has conceptualized the way practices unfold in the presence of others as an "ecology of practices."[21] "Approaching a practice," she writes, "means approaching it as it diverges, that is, feeling its borders" (Stengers 2005a, 184). Divergence, as de la Cadena explains, is a potent tool for holding both connection and difference in relation: "Different from contradiction, divergence does not presuppose homogeneous terms—instead, divergence refers to the coming together of heterogeneous practices that will become other than what they were, while continuing to be the same—they become self-different" (de la Cadena 2015, 280). One can find such divergence reflected in the nomenclature through which practitioners refer to their object. What I have been calling buildings also go by other names that reflect the particularity of their place in ecologies of practice: for market analysts and experienced investors, they are *inmuebles* (pieces of real estate); for architects, they are *proyectos* (projects of design); for the people who live in and around them, *casas* (homes) in *barrios* (neighborhoods). These different nomenclatures are not incidental, but refer to real differences between the objects that each group engages and produces. Buildings, in this sense, are parts that do not resolve into wholes, even while their different striations do not remain isolated, but stand in relation to one another. None of these buildings, in other words, are alone. Concrete dreams are partially connected to one another through the force of their shared objects—shared, but in a way that doesn't erase the divergent practices of those who engage them.

My dictionary tells me that the English word *concrete* comes from the past participle of *concrescere*: to grow together. In this vein, Alfred North Whitehead has described the concrete as a "concrescence of prehesions," which Haraway explains as "graspings," a "reaching into each other" through which "beings constitute each other and themselves" (2003, 6). Scientists call the process through which concrete grows together hydration. Many people

think that concrete hardens as it dries, but the opposite is true: it hardens through a long, slow process of getting wet. After an initial dormancy in which it remains malleable, the cement grains begin to dissolve in water and release calcium silicate ions, which grow into needles and platelet-shaped crystals that hold the rocky aggregates in place. Hydration continues long after the concrete seems solid: typical cement cured in moist conditions will reach 80 percent hydration only after twenty-eight days and continue to slowly hydrate and strengthen over the course of months or even years. Practices, too, bear the trace of such long, slow processes of growing together in ongoing, divergent projects of value-in-relation—reaching into, though also at times working to reach across or around, one another.

This is slightly different than thinking with chains of production, which might imply an additive, linear process—investment, production, consumption—one link of the chain added to the next. The chain metaphor can be helpful, but risks overlooking more complex forms of relation, the kind of more-than-one-less-than-many copresence evoked by an ecology of practices. Thinking the question of value from the standpoint of an ecology of practices casts the question in a slightly different relief, attending to simultaneous rather than linear dimensions of difference while taking seriously the chains that threaten to shackle all creative acts to the service of a market.

Approaching value as part of an ecology of practices is a way of keeping minor, intimate, quotidian politics of value present in what could otherwise slide into major-key histories of capitalism, colonialism, and national political struggles. The increasing incorporation of ever more ways of living into hegemonic projects of economic value production—and the concomitant reduction of worlds to one dominant metric of value—has been a part of many world-changing projects, including imperialism, globalization, and capitalism. Even in a place like Buenos Aires—for centuries a peripheral metropolitan outlet of extractivism from Latin America—there are, it seems, always deeper ways for lifeworlds to be mined for economic value. But lived worlds also continue to defy the monopoly of these projects to create one hegemonic measure of value. In this ethnography, I am interested in keeping attention on the threats facing forms of particularity that resist totalizing incorporation into a common world of value. Practitioners, in working to maintain the divergent requirements and obligations of their own practices, also care for the forms of value dear to them; they do this at times by formulating counter-hegemonic projects, or at times by simply looking for ways to endure.[22]

This is a book about buildings, then, but it is also a book about markets, the politics inherent in struggles over value, and how they emerge in and articulate distinct domains of practice. Different versions of buildings are produced and relate to one another in markets, but *not markets where only market value thrives*. Markets are full of other, divergent forms of value and the histories and dreams from which they are built in practice. In a context of subtle but fundamental transformations in the lives of buildings that transpired around the crisis and the argentinazo, various forms of value were set against one another. This divergence over what good buildings are and could be is the politics inherent to the practices I study. I understand markets as the rigged, nonneutral arenas in which multiple, divergent forms of value vie for continued existence.

Threats to the endurance of many of these forms of value are constant and severe, but so are the possibilities that they offer. Time and again capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism have proven themselves inadequate to the task of global conquest. It's not that they have failed to produce results or in many ways to strengthen their hold. But they have failed at total incorporation without excess or remainder—a remainder that continues to haunt. For every moment of deterritorialization of established ways of being, new multiplicities have flourished that continue ongoing projects of constructing livable worlds.

This book is written from the conviction that attending to minor forms of value operative in the world can be a first step in thinking about how to cultivate them. Mariela's endurance in an economic life marked by her peripheral place in global and national economies of financial extraction; Bárbara's drawings and the concern for the life that will unfold within them; and Patricia's life on her terrace with the sky and her plants, family, and neighbors: staying with their efforts to make forms of value endure is a way to stay alive to possibilities for building better worlds. It also means sitting with contradictions and impurities and few, if any, promises of great transformation.

DIVERGENT VALUES, MINOR KEYS: BUILDINGS AFTER THE CRISIS

I carry vivid images of the crisis in my head, transmitted to me through documentary films like *The Take*, by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein (2004), and *Memoria del Saqueo* (Memory of the Sacking), by Pino Solanas (2004). They are aesthetically evocative images of popular revolt: drums, rocks, tear gas, the

people against the police. I'm told that's also kind of how the whole thing felt: ten years of individualized, consumerist, risk-mitigating, rational subjectivity constructed during neoliberalism's heyday scuttled in the jouissance of collective uprising. In the heady days of the argentinazo, the poor sacked grocery stores while the rich sacked the money of the entire country with sophisticated financial techniques that secreted money to offshore havens.

Somewhere between the two, an image of a blonde woman dressed for the office loops in my head. She's hacking at the screen of an ATM with a pen, over and over, while tear gas rolls up the street outside. Her face is set, focused, intense, and she's eventually led away from the machine, but she keeps her eyes fixed on it and the pen clutched in her hand. Of course, the money that the woman wanted wasn't actually inside that particular ATM, and that was part of the problem: even if she could break it open, she wouldn't get her money back.

For a student steeped in the ethnography of finance, the scene remains evocative. Ethnographic work in major financial institutions, of traders on Wall Street and the designers of derivative contracts, had taught me to pay close attention to the materiality of financial instruments, even when they appeared at first blush not to have a materiality at all.[23] The apparently immaterial world of finance, this work taught me, was in fact underpinned by a chorus of voices and hand signals in open-outcry trading pits, numbers coursing across the screens of digital trading terminals, and the paper derivative contracts moving through the departments of global investment banks. In Argentina, these forms of capital movement had enabled rich individuals and multinational corporations to escape the bank embargo that trapped the money of the woman banging the ATM in her account and the subsequent devaluation that would wipe out a big chunk of its value.

My own fieldwork began a few years after the crisis, in the context of an economy and polity looking for a way forward. As an anthropologist, I was interested in thinking through these broad shifts in political economy through a concrete set of dilemmas that could be studied ethnographically. I began with an interest in economic practice, following a thread from the crisis. Ethnographic work on finance had brought the study of financial institutions into dialogue with long-standing anthropological concerns about value and the choreographies of persons and things that unfold in exchange across social and geographical topographies.[24] But how did all this look from the perspective of everyday people in a peripheral economy like Argentina's?

Chapter 1 takes up the story of small-scale real estate investors like Mariela, describing the emergence of real estate as a central form of savings for middle-class investors following the crisis of 2001. The construction boom that would unfold in the years after the crisis hinged on the bank embargo and subsequent devaluation of the peso, which shook people's faith in banks and finance to the core and rekindled historical anxieties around the instability of currency in Argentina. A few years later, as the economy began to recover, people began to seek out forms of saving that were disarticulated from banks. Since the crisis had wiped out mortgage lending, real estate in the post-crisis years provided just what they were looking for. Many people like Mariela—*pequeños ahorristas*, or small savers, they are called—bought apartments, finding in buildings a more solid way to save their savings. That Buenos Aires' post-crisis real estate market was said to be driven by a distrust of banks installed during the crisis—the kind of animus toward banking manifested by the woman banging the ATM—drew out for me the question of real estate's place in economic life. How does real estate work as a form of investment that exists alongside others, including dollars and pesos, cash and bank accounts? What is particular about real estate in Argentina, and how is it incorporated into the economic practices of small savers burned by a national economic meltdown? The chapter considers these questions through stories told about economic history—in informal settings as well as in newspaper stories, comics, memoir, and jokes. I find in these stories the tools through which Argentines develop sensibilities about the economy that guide buildings' incorporation into post-crisis investment practices in which different media of savings bear contrasting capacities for conserving value and for staying put. Within these stories, the valorization of buildings hinges on their contrast with the seemingly ephemeral, transnational capital flows prevalent in Argentina in the 1990s that did so much damage during the crisis.

Chapter 2 turns from lay investors like Mariela to ask after buildings' existence within the practices of an adjacent group, professional real estate analysts, whose voices I found frequently represented in the news media on real estate investment. These market experts approached questions that were in many ways similar to those of small investors concerning the place of real estate in post-crisis investment ecologies, but did so using a different set of tools, including charts, graphs, and forms of historical narrative articulated with them. I was interested in learning how the practices of these experts worked to both understand and help form a market in real estate, which I undertook by

both reading industry publications and attending conferences and seminars. The chapter begins by considering the process of appraisal through which an apartment's market value is determined, a process that involves a series of minute comparisons that ultimately allow buildings to circulate with one another in a market through a number: price per square meter. While such numerical instantiations of buildings are at times sought after because of their ability to construct comparative economic frames for apartments that allow the market to function, numbers are never sufficient tools for market analysis, I learned. In the second analytical practice I examine, analysts reload these numbers with historical content, constructing narratives about the rise and fall of prices over decades and placing price into thick historical contexts in order to forecast potential futures. By juxtaposing these two stories of buildings' numerical lives, this chapter highlights the relationality of numbers within broader systems of their production and legibility.

The values people held in buildings extended far beyond economic spheres, however—a trouble I was interested in staying with. I found one set of frictions within various neighborhood movements to limit construction that began to make headlines in 2006, when an organized group of residents in the neighborhood of Caballito forced the city to freeze the issuance of construction permits in a sixteen-block area of the city through a deft series of legal and political actions. The boom was felt particularly strongly in neighborhoods like Caballito, Palermo, Villa Pueyrredón, and Villa Urquiza—parts of Buenos Aires that were historically less dense than upper-class neighborhoods like Belgrano or Recoleta, but that were respectable enough to attract investment when the boom took off. The buildings built during the boom were of many different sorts: some were refined works of architecture; others were luxurious high-rises with amenities like gyms and rooftop pools; the vast majority were unremarkable except for their size, often reaching ten stories tall in neighborhoods where all the other buildings were only one or two stories tall. As construction moved ahead, in some neighborhoods at a dizzying pace, neighborhood groups across the city (like Patricia's) organized against the spate of new construction, questioning the state planning structures that permitted them and drawing attention to the urban lifeworlds being lost at the hands of real estate development.

Chapter 3 focuses on the particular kinds of environments around which people like Patricia organized—the barrio (typically translated as neighborhood)—and the kinds of values produced through practices of barrio dwelling. One of the first articles I read about political efforts against tall buildings

featured an interview with a retiree who spoke about the ten-story building that went up next to his house, cutting off the sun from his garden. The deep sadness in his description of the loss of his garden could easily be disregarded as geopolitically insignificant. But for me, it opened up a realm of humble quotidian practices that served to link up questions of the built environment and the habitus of neighborhood life with the apparently distant concerns of national political-economic transformation. Was it possible that practices like gardening offered a perspective from which to open up the politics of value in barrio life as irreducible to, but also connected with, broader post-crisis public sentiments that had cooled to the suggestion, much touted in the 1990s, that market-driven economic development would produce a better collective life for Argentines? Standing with Patricia and looking up at the ten-story buildings going up around her little rooftop terrace, neither of us could ignore the resonance with the rampant privatizations of the 1990s, when the post office, the national petroleum corporation, the national airline, electric and phone companies, pension funds, and more were privatized with the promise of improved service and benefits for all—promises that never materialized in the first place and definitively went up in smoke during the crisis. If the major political events that had defined Argentine political and economic struggle over the past several years seemed far afield, there was also a sense in which they were right here, literally in her backyard. From her small terrace in Villa Pueyrredón, it felt as if they were coming to take the sky itself.

In this chapter, I show how practices of care for plants and green space—in parks, gardens, patios, and terraces—helped foment a mode of attention to the built environment that led *vecinos* into political advocacy. The practices of barrio life are extended and valorized through concrete dreams such as poems, song lyrics, and literature about barrio life that help sustain barrios' value as particular, historically resonant sites of relationality between people and their environments. In this sense, barrios are important sites in which buildings' smooth incorporation into economic forms of investment did not always have easy tread—a topic I examine through some of the public political actions carried out by neighborhood groups that sought to make noneconomic forms of value endure in the face of persistent real estate development.

In chapter 4, I follow some of these neighborhood groups into the halls of city government, where their efforts to rewrite the city's urban planning code drew them into the legal and bureaucratic world of state institutions surrounding buildings. They became experts at reading and interpreting

these codes, conducted audits of construction to detect code violations, and engaged the political and bureaucratic machinery of urban construction. The state that neighborhood groups took me into contact with was not a rational bureaucratic state engaged in top-down, expert-driven planning, nor did it conform to the participatory democratic projects that are often held up as a kind of gold standard in conversations surrounding the democratization of urban planning. Instead, authorship over the urban planning code—yet another concrete dream in which buildings were manifest—was understood to be linked to the machinations of a powerful but obscure set of monied interests working in collusion with state actors to resist any limits on the real estate and construction sector. For all the neighborhood groups I worked with, whatever hopes they initially held at approaching legal and bureaucratic bodies with a well-reasoned set of arguments about the impact of private development, in order to receive a rational and reasoned response, were quickly dashed in the face of a world of shady collusions between money and power. I knew that the history of planning was marked by both early modern efforts by states to intervene in construction in the interest of public hygiene and access to air and sunlight and by struggles against powerful state planners on the part of democratic movements who saw their neighborhoods threatened by state urban renewal projects. How did neighborhood groups' advocacy around planning recast historical relationships among capitalist development, urban planning expertise, and state politics? And in what ways did they refract ongoing tensions in Argentina between democratic politics and the power of money and development? I consider the structure of power and knowledge implied by bureaucratic codes and follow neighborhood groups in questioning the purported democratic nature of this bureaucratic instantiation of buildings. I do so by attending particularly to buildings' appearance in the intrigue-laden narratives of political storytelling circulated as gossip and tales of corruption—stories that situate buildings within dense networks of power and money.

Chapter 5 examines buildings within another terrain of value and practice, that of architectural pedagogy in the University of Buenos Aires. In the same year that the neighborhood residents of Caballito made their front-page headlines, a feature article in the Argentine architectural journal *Summa+* brought together a roundtable of small entrepreneurial architecture firms who were engaged in a new way of building buildings that had emerged in this changing economic landscape. During the course of the crisis, many mid-sized construction companies had folded when the bank credit and mortgage lending

on which they depended disappeared from the country's economic landscape. At first, this left only the largest and most well-financed developers, who focused on construction in elite zones of the city. But as more and more pequeños ahorristas sought out apartments, small groups of architects, many of whom were out of work, began to find ways to build buildings. They circumnavigated bank lending by selling apartments (for cash) before they were built, collecting enough capital through down payments to buy property, and funding construction with later installments. The article in *Summa+* was a conversation among architects who were reevaluating their place in the chain of production, moving beyond their traditional roles as designers and beginning to insert themselves in *negocios*—the business side of construction. This new place in the construction process required the development of a different set of skills and a reformulation of the concerns and forms of engagement that many architects had with buildings.

Such transformations were not without their detractors. While some saw the opportunity to usher in a new era of design in which architecture could come into its own without the interference of developers, others saw market forces reaching more deeply than ever into the hearts and minds of architects. These concerns unfolded in a post-crisis context, but also in relation to a history of sensitivity to architecture's place in commodity society, both within the discipline and in Argentina in particular, through which architects sought to foster the production of more inclusive, livable worlds beyond the limits of market-based construction. I was convinced that these kinds of commitments and their endurance in architectural circles were not insignificant.

In my conversations with architects, they frequently cited the university—where many continued to be involved as teachers or in postgraduate work—as a key site through which their practice of architecture could find expression beyond the demands of market-based production. Their comments brought me into the architecture school at the University of Buenos Aires, where I observed professors teaching students like Bárbara to care for lived experience in built environments in a way that exceeded—even if it did not escape—those defined by real estate. I begin by describing how architectural students like Bárbara are taught to think through their own bodies and through practices of drawing and model making, which I argue are generative of a politics of care that offers the possibility of conserving human-building relations in the face of alternative relational possibilities that threaten to overtake them. Also present in the architecture school—though not always in an explicit way—were inheritances of the violent political struggles that

gripped the university during two dictatorships, the first from 1966 to 1973, the second from 1976 to 1984. One of the two lead professors I worked with was subject to a political purge from the university during the first (while the other was a student), and both had to go into hiding during the second, in which many other students and colleagues were disappeared. In the brief interregnum between the two, both were involved in a leftist reformation of university pedagogy that sought to problematize architecture's place in commodity society and direct educational praxis toward addressing the needs of more popular sectors of society—projects that they continue to make endure in very different economic and political environments today. Like the neighborhood groups described in chapters 3 and 4, I see in the architecture school the maintenance of minor forms of value that operate in tension—at times implicit, at times explicit—with the hegemony of buildings' economic value.

In the epilogue, I reflect upon more recent economic and political shifts in Argentina and Latin America, leveraging them to describe the value I see in concrete dreams' minor-key articulations of possibility vis-à-vis major-key political projects. Thinking through minor-key values—and the politics, histories, and concrete forms of the practices that sustain them—can give substance to some possibilities worth holding onto in the work of producing livable futures.

.....

"*Cada cual con sus trabajos / Con sus sueños, cada cual,*" wrote Atahaulpa Yupanqui in the song I used to open this book. Each one with their work, with their dreams, each one. A folk singer dedicated to articulating the everyday lives of the popular classes with big-stage political dreams, Yupanqui was inspirational for the *nuevo cancionero* singers of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s who used song as a tool to express the dreams, struggles, and hopes of a people working toward a better world in a context of growing political repression and marked by histories of deep inequality. Listening recently, the words struck me for the way they maintain a place for divergence in a song about shared histories and possible collective futures: each one with their work, with their dreams each one. The song continues: With hope before them / With memories behind. The word for hope—*esperanza*—contains within itself a sense of durative time (*esperar* is also *to wait*), evoking for me the way inherited histories and possible futures are bound up with the endurance of divergent practices and values.

"Getting on together" is one of the ways Helen Verran (2001) has put the task she sees before us, part of the generative practice of "doing difference together" (Verran and Christie 2011) in the interest of composing livable worlds.[25] The practice of getting on together does not hang on a totalizing revolutionary transformation, but rather sits within the cracks of an edifice that is anything but solid. Remaining sensitive to real threats of capture while fostering ways of getting on together is a sensibility that feminist scholars have taught me to cultivate.[26] It's a mode of attention that could only come from the margins, I think, where possibilities are articulated in minor keys.

The story I tell here, then, is one of possibility and endurance as I learned about them from people in Argentina who have taught me that all is not lost. Studying the divergent practices through which buildings are valued is a way into thinking about markets and politics and the forms of difference made to endure within them. Penelope Harvey has written that "concrete's promise to operate as a generic, homogeneous, and above all predictable material is constantly challenged by the instability and heterogeneity of the terrains to which it is applied" (2010, 28; see also Gambetta 2013). The minor-key ethnographic and historical terrains I speak of matter in this way as well. As part of concrete's extended compound materiality—alongside water, rock, and cement—they form the particular, shifting, and never-quite-solid worlds on which concrete dreams are built.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: CONCRETE DREAMS

1 In anthropology there is a long history of thinking value in this register and of attending to the ways that value is created in practice. In *The Fame of Gawa* (1993), for example, Nancy Munn studied the ways that Gawans, through practices like gardening, canoe building, and *kula* exchange, imbued the world around them with value and in turn derived value from them. Kula exchange and gardening are different practices that both produce and rely on different forms of value: while kula travel is about lightness and extension, gardening is about heaviness and concentration. Different ritual practices produce these values, ensuring good kula and good gardens. On the different valences of value in the history of anthropology, see Graeber (2001).

2 A long history of scholarship has worked to problematize the image of the subject as pure mind, divorced not only from subjects' bodies but the world around them and the tools they use to engage it. I come to this work through Science and Technology Studies, where the importance of machines, instruments, and experimental setups has been treated as a central feature of scientific knowledge production. See, for example, Callon (1986), Hacking (1983), Latour (2005), Law and Hassard (1999), and Pickering (1995). Recently, scholars (including many anthropologists) have deployed a similar approach to analyze the importance of documents in understanding bureaucracy (Hetherington 2011; Hull 2012); of drawings, models, and imaging technologies in various forms of knowledge (Dumit 2004; Kaiser 2005; Latour and Yaneva 2008; Mialet 2012; Mol 2002; Myers 2015; Raffles 2010; Rheinberger 2010; Taussig 2011; Vertesi 2012); of charts, graphs, and algorithms in international finance (Lépinay 2011; Zaloom 2006); and even the particularity of certain forms of speech, like jokes and rumors, in political life (Das 2006; Nelson 1999). This work has shown the ways that forms of knowledge are entangled with the tools of practice and that fine-tuned attention to these tools is critical to understanding how knowledge and values are produced and circulated.

3 Michelle Murphy has described this as the production of "regimes of perceptibility" in which "arrangements of words, things, practices and people [draw] out and [make] perceptible specific qualities, capacities and possibilities" (M. Murphy

2006). On requirements and obligations, see Stengers (2010). See also Bourdieu (1977) and de Certeau (1984).

4 I take the word *situated* from Donna Haraway (1988), who proposed situating knowledge as a powerful tool for producing accounts of knowledge that do not ignore the broader power dynamics of which they are a part. Along with other feminist scholars of science, she pointed out limitations to the ways that certain laboratory studies circumscribed practices within the laboratory without taking into account the ways that structural forms of inequality get built into and out of scientific knowledge production. She saw situating all knowledge as a way to disrupt the "view from nowhere" of masculinist, universalizing science by showing how all knowledges are situated, and not just those of women and others who have long been said to have a particular perspective or standpoint. Haraway thus situates the knowledge practices of Western science within sets of power relations including gender, race, colonialism, and capitalism. Showing how knowledge is situated socially and technically is a means of approaching relationships between knowledge and power and of producing responsible accounts of their relationship.

5 My initial fieldwork plan for this book was to hold the one object with which my various sets of actors were concerned—the building—at the center of analysis and to follow buildings through the different worlds in which they played a central role, a method based on tracing the chain of production of contested objects, mapping the conflicts and struggles over them and the social worlds that unfold around them. As Anna Tsing (2005, 51) has argued, each step in these chains can be seen as an arena of cultural production; analyzing the frictions between these often divergent cultural economies, which can be linked in awkward, uncomfortable ways, allows for a thick ethnographic understanding of the social lives of the objects and the cultural worlds that surround them (see also Appadurai 1986).

And yet, as I moved between different groups of actors in the field, I realized that the building that I was attempting to follow was not in any way stable. Rather, its materiality shifted in ways that made it nearly unrecognizable between the different sites in which buildings existed. Indeed, over time I began to question whether I was following one object at all. Was a building one thing that moved between worlds, or was it many different things? To what extent was there an "it" to follow? When and how did it appear, and how did it seem to both be the center of everything, and yet so difficult to pinpoint at the same time?

This dilemma, and the question of how to express it ethnographically, was one impetus behind conceiving of this book as an ethnography of practices. On the one hand, buildings can be many different things—investments, objects of design, environments for living. In this sense, they are multiple. And yet, this multiplicity is not the kind that enables a conflict-free coexistence in harmonious plurality: buildings are fraught terrains on which practitioners with diverging requirements and obligations make claims, and they can and do press in on one another. In this sense, John Law (2002, 3–4) has described objects as existing neither within a single dimension nor in multiple independent dimensions; instead, they are drawn together without being centered, cohering in a state that hangs between singularity and plurality. In this sense, buildings are "more than one and less than many," to borrow Marilyn Strathern's phrase (2004, 35).

Different instantiations of buildings can come together, but not in ways that necessarily resolve or overcome their differences. Practices offer me a way to hold present the various material manifestations of buildings, blurring the focus of the perceived stability of objects and instead building toward a form of perception in which buildings "come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated" (Mol 2002, 5). Practices allow me to place the different media in which buildings are instantiated front and center, and begin to think contextually from there. I came to think of buildings not as stable entities, but as a kind of flickering set of layers that moved in and out of focus, always in the presence of others.

6 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have written about this as the virtual. See also DeLanda (2002) and Massumi (2002).

7 I describe these measures in detail in chapter 1.

8 On narratives of crisis, see Roitman (2013).

9 See, for example, Klein (2007).

10 On neoliberalism and the years after the crisis in relation to it, see de la Barra (2009), Faulk (2012), Gutman and Cohen (2007), Levitsky and Roberts (2011), Masiello (2001), Rock (2002), and Shever (2012).

11 It's hard to overstate the extent to which conservative factions in the country tried to purge Peronism from the country: one of the military leaders, Aramburu, made it illegal to speak the names of Perón or Evita; Evita's body was later exhumed and secreted to a foreign grave, a story dramatized in the novel *Santa Evita* (Martínez 1997).

12 The concentration of both left and right factions of Peronism at the airport to receive Perón on his return to Argentina in 1973 ended in a shoot-out, with estimates placing the death toll in the tens and injuries in the hundreds (the episode is explored in depth in Verbitsky [1985]). Perón would make his allegiance clear in a major May Day rally in which he threw his support behind conservative trade unionists. The left withdrew their columns from the plaza, and violence against them escalated, presaging the actions of the dictatorship in 1976. Despite Perón's own disavowal of the left, in the years to come Peronism would remain a multivalent political category in Argentina, which many describe in terms of a contradictory copresence of left and right tendencies within the Peronist party. Today, Perón remains a poignant figure for those on the left. While many reject Peronism for a variety of communist and socialist parties, others continue to identify (often in ambivalent ways) with the legacy of Perón. On some of these legacies, see Daniel James (1994).

13 The military government's liberalization of the economy coincided with a new phase of U.S. imperialism driven through foreign loans. The OPEC oil crisis, stagflation in the United States, and a deal brokered by the U.S. with OPEC countries to filter petroleum profits through Wall Street investment banks, together with a dearth of profitable investments in the U.S. led to a surge of lending to foreign countries (D. Harvey 2005). The military government in Argentina accrued heavy debt. In the 1980s, U.S. economic measures against stagflation (the "Volcker Shock") effectively cut off credit from the developing world, provoking debt crises throughout much of the developing world (Branford and Kucinski 1988; see Roddick 1988). Argentina, by the end of the 1980s, was one of the fifteen most severely indebted countries in the world.

14 In his notes on the translation for *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi explains that Deleuze's use of *milieu* is a combination of the word's three meanings in French: "surroundings," "medium" (as in chemistry), and "middle" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvii).

15 Erin Manning describes the minor in this sense as being tightly connected to "the event at hand," even as it exceeds its bounds: "Each minor gesture is singularly connected to the event at hand, immanent to the in-act. This makes it pragmatic. But the minor gesture also exceeds the bounds of the event, touching on the ineffable quality of its more-than. This makes it speculative. The minor gesture works in the mode of speculative pragmatism. From a speculatively pragmatic stance, it invents its own value, a value as ephemeral as it is mobile" (Manning 2016, 2).

16 For example, Marilyn Strathern noted in the late 1980s, "There are other metaphors today on which the anthropologist draws: communicational field, ecosystem, social formation, even structure, all of which construct global contexts for the interconnection of events and relations. Their danger lies in making the system appear to be the subject under scrutiny rather than the method of scrutiny. The phenomena come to appear contained or encompassed by the systemics, and thus themselves systemic. So we get entangled in world systems and deep structures and worry about the 'level' at which they exist in the phenomena themselves" (Strathern 1988). Understanding events and relations as "contained or encompassed by the systemics, and thus themselves systemic" gives little room to the attention to minor forms of difference that is, for many of us, one of ethnography's hallmark strengths.

17 Manning offers the following in this regard: "The unwavering belief in the major as the site where events occur, where events make a difference, is based on accepted accounts of what registers as change as well as existing parameters for gauging the value of that change. Yet while the grand gestures of a macropolitics most easily sum up the changes that occurred to alter the field, it is the minoritarian tendencies that initiate the subtle shifts that created the conditions for this, and any change. The grand is given the status it has not because it is where the transformative power lies, but because it is easier to identify major shifts than to catalogue the nuanced rhythms of the minor. As a result, these rhythms are narrated as secondary, or even negligible" (2016, 1).

18 On intellectual currents that operate in tension with critique, see Anker and Felski (2017); on the limits of critique as an intellectual practice, see Latour (2004); on finding promise and possibility in practice, see Muñoz (2009).

19 In *The End of Capitalism* (*As We Knew It*), Gibson-Graham work to decenter capitalism's hold on our economic imaginaries and the way we view the world around us. Their examples are humble, like looking to child-care reciprocity networks to unthink the idea that we are living in a world completely characterized by market exchange. As they describe their project, they seek to "discover or create a world of economic difference, and to populate that world with exotic creatures that become, upon inspection, quite local and familiar (not to mention familiar beings that are not what they seem)" (1996, 3). More recently, Anna Tsing (2015) has

shown how even in the midst of market interactions, other forms of value endure, like the divergent ways that mushroom foragers value their practice and the mushrooms they collect. For Tsing, mushrooms in the markets of the Pacific Northwest and Japan are not pure commodities, because they carry these other values along with them. See also Paxson (2012) and Weiss (2016).

20 On striation, segmentarity, and territorialization, see Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

21 Stengers's use of ecology in this sense corresponds to thinking "par le milieux" or with the surroundings, as I explained earlier. Throughout this book I make use of the words *ecology* and *environment* in different ways, at times signaling the social, technical, political, economic, affective, and embodied surroundings of practices, at times referring to the buildings, plants, sky, and social life of the city. My sense of playfulness here is deliberate. My own thought is indebted to the work of many environmental anthropologists, and my play with these terms is an insistence on that relation. Environments, as these scholars have shown, are hardly passive backdrops in which action takes place. And they are never only green but, like the city I study here, meticulously worked-over and cared-for compositions of organic and inorganic materials, human and other-than-human beings. *Ecology* is a word that I find useful for drawing out the tense and dynamic sets of relations that are involved in the composition of environments; as I explain in chapter 1, I draw on the double valence of the shared root of economy and ecology, the Greek *oikos*, or the home, and again at times transgress what may seem like the most straightforward use of these terms.

22 On endurance, see Povinelli (2011).

23 See especially Zaloom (2003, 2006, 2009) and Lépinay (2011).

24 See Guyer (2004), Hayden (2003), Kockelman (2016), Munn (1993), Roitman (2005), Weiner (1992), and Zelizer (1994).

25 On the political ontology of doing difference, see also Blaser (2009).

26 On capture, see Pignarre and Stengers (2011).

CHAPTER 1: CRISIS HISTORIES, BRICK FUTURES

1 On the economic practices of Argentine elites, see Abelin (2012).

2 An excellent explication of the subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S. can be found in a collaborative podcast, "The Giant Pool of Money" (2008), by *This American Life* and *NPR News*. On the mortgage modification programs that followed and the ways debt and reciprocity inhere within contemporary financialized mortgage markets, see Stout (2016).

3 Major developers who could leverage financing for large-scale projects without recourse to Argentine banks were also largely absent from the market after the crisis, with the exception of a few concentrated zones of the city, like Puerto Madero. On Puerto Madero, see Guano (2002).

4 Deposits were converted to pesos at a rate of 1.40 pesos per dollar, nearly half the free market rate in March of 2002, and even less than half by May when the dollar was trading at close to 3 pesos.