REVOLUTION!
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REVOLUTION!
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Correspondence

thresholds—MIT Architecture
77 Massachusetts Ave, Room 7-337
Cambridge, MA 02139

thresholds@mit.edu
http://thresholds.mit.edu

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STAKING CLAIMS
ANA MARÍA LEÓN

Resist whatever seems inevitable.
Resist people who seem invincible.
Lebbeus Woods (1940-2012)

No quiero cambiar la arquitectura, lo que quiero cambiar es esa sociedad de mierda.
Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012)

What actions are prompted by revolution in the space of the city? Which publics take part in this struggle, and who are the agents that mobilize it? And after a revolution has subsided, how is it remembered, represented and memorialized? thresholds 41: REVOLUTION! turns to the history, design, and cultural production of the public realm as a site of dissensus. Rather than focusing on a specific revolutionary time and place, we have strived to include different periods and regions, organizing contributions in terms of the relations they establish between sites, actors, and contexts. In the essays and designs featured in these pages, political struggle often shifts established roles—agitators create new types of public space, designers become activists and fundraisers, individual figures fade in favor of collectives or groups, and actions are best remembered through misrepresentation. How do we write revolution, who writes it and for whom? And, in turn, how does urban conflict inform writing, design, and cultural production at large? Our authors, designers, and artists open up revolution as subject, as event, and as historiographical problem—a problem complicated by discrete actions, multiple publics, critical practices, and the politics of display and remembrance.

As a prologue to our conversation, David Gissen proposes commemorating the events of the 1871 Paris Commune by rebuilding the mound of Vendôme, originally built by the Communards to preserve some elements of the city while destroying others. Through images of the reconstructed mound encased in glass, Gissen suggests a paradoxical relationship between destruction and preservation. With this proposal to lift the paving stones of Paris one more time, we introduce a first group of authors focused on actions on the ground: street performances and political protests take the streets of Mexico City, London, Sahibabad, and Cairo. These disparate geographies are brought into contact by virtue of their shared site, the public commons, and their desire to occupy it to voice political protest.
Robin Adèle Greeley disentangles the assumed relationship between democracy and civic space in Mexico City by weighing how civic movements were alternately repressed, reactivated, or mobilized in three key instances: the Tlatelolco Massacre (1968), Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s piece *Voz Alta* (2008) and the work of #YoSoy132 during the 2012 presidential elections. Lozano-Hemmer opposes the dominance of the Mexican state in the public sphere, Greeley explains, by literally giving latent political communities the opportunity to speak *en voz alta*. Britt Eversole historicizes a very different kind of street performance in his study of King Mob’s activities in 1970s London. Describing the group’s aggressive, deliberately offensive posters mocking depiction of the supposedly revolutionary architecture of Cedric Price and Archigram, Eversole reminds us disciplinary boundaries might limit political engagement, but critical practices can transcend these constraints.

In an excerpt from his forthcoming book *Sahmat 1989-2009: The Liberal Arts in the Liberalized Public Sphere*, Arindam Dutta assembles events that occurred between the 1st and the 5th of January 1989: the murder of theatrical performer and activist Safdar Hashmi in Sahibabad, India, and the subsequent formation of Sahmat, a platform of cultural activists and producers. Dutta’s microhistory shifts focus from the individual figure and singular event to the multiplicity of collective actions and their expanded reach. This is not to say, however, that resolution is attained—rather, the excerpt ends with the start of a new dispute, a contradictory outcome and a surprise guest. If Dutta’s historiographical momentum leads away from the individual as agent, it also hints to the role of the historian as witness. Also focusing on collective action, Diane E. Davis and Prassanna Raman’s essay examines the urban sites of recent struggle, including Cairo, Tripoli, Manama, and New York. Their piece claims the physical presence of crowds in both planned and improvised spaces of assembly is an important form of citizenship. Media coverage, they point out, tends to favor planned spaces such as squares and plazas over the improvised character of streets and thoroughfares as sites for struggle. While focusing on the possibility for citizens to create new spaces through occupation, Davis and Raman also call attention to the role of urban designers in the creation of more equitable societies.

With this reflection on the interaction between citizens and the built environment, we shift focus from event to audience—what is this much-vaunted notion of the public, what are its origins, and how is it changing in our networked society? Furthermore, how can the design professions, inevitably linked to the forces of capital, serve the needs of publics outside these forces? Mark Jarzombek outlines the three principles posited by Immanuel Kant in his 1790 *Critique of Judgement* to deliver society into enlightenment: to think for oneself, to think in the mindset of others, and to think consistently. In examining the implications of these principles, Jarzombek finds the notion of ‘the public’—a term that we might think to be relatively obvious in its meanings—is surprisingly absent in Kant’s speculations. He envisions the unexpected repercussions of this absence by illustrating what a Kantian city might look like (with...
the help of a thresholds friend). Our present condition, Jarzombek proposes, might be closer to Kant’s figurations than much of the modern discourse misled by this discursive absence.

Thérèse F. Tierney traces the role of social media in reformulating public spheres. The development of social networks has given rise to new, increasingly fragmented realms, allowing for both expanded networks of communication and increased surveillance and control. Tierney explores the consequences of these virtual changes, as they ultimately manifest themselves in the physical space of the city. Kenneth Ip examines some of these consequences in contemporary Hong Kong. Ip explains the mobilization of social networks in protest marches in the city, their effectiveness at the level of the street, and the possibility for architecture to dismantle them. By presenting us with a theoretical project to counter popular demonstrations, Ip foregrounds the facility with which architecture may become a tool of repression. Nasser Rabbat suggests modern architecture’s complicity with the state is compounded by its dependency on the forces of capital. Architecture can be revolutionary, Rabbat states, by granting the right to architecture to publics that cannot afford it. Finding alternative ways to fund projects allows architectural practices to reclaim their political agency. Reinhold Martin expands on the nature of this agency, recalling Rosa Luxemburg’s admonition, “Reform or Revolution.” To the supposedly revolutionary architecture of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, Martin counterposes architecture’s capacity for reform, challenging us to go beyond formalist utopias. Revolution is not located in pragmatic problem-solving, he affirms, but rather in the reformulation of the system that caused these problems in the first place.

Calls for agency and reform lead to our next section, focused on practice and the architects and artists that strive to enact political change by reaffirming or reformulating their disciplines. By highlighting lack of action, documenting disobedience, or simply stepping in when the state is absent, these agents do more than question authority: they hold it accountable. Urban historian Lawrence Vale interviews Tunney Lee, one of the architects and urban planners involved in the design and implementation of Resurrection City, an occupation of the National Mall in Washington DC in 1968. Lee and Vale discuss the logistics, design strategies, and politics of the Civil Rights Movement as they developed in the months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the contribution of four architects and city planners to the Poor People’s March. Lee’s straightforward advice for young practitioners is predicated on the possibility of political agency within architectural practice.

In the aftermath of the Spanish financial crisis, there was a shift in the operation of small architecture offices, and individual figures gave way to collectives, groups, and associations that move fluidly between roles as designers, clients, fundraisers, and community activists. This shift parallels the organizational tactics of the Spanish Acampadas, suggesting political movement has informed and enriched architectural
practice. Two recent projects by architects-turned-activists employ these tactics. While Andrés Jaque and the Office for Political Innovation operate by pointing out the voids and contradictions in existing legislation, Santiago Cirugeda and Recetas Urbanas propose direct, if often illegal, resistance. Jaque is interested in the reappropriation of old materials into new uses and the readymade quality of the result, offering the possibility of queer uses of available systems. Although also interested in reuse, Cirugeda emphasizes the collective nature of the construction process and frames the studio’s work as a response to the inefficiency of local authorities. In their critical posture, participatory methods, and fluid collaborations, the Office for Political Innovation and Recetas Urbanas recall the procedures of political protest while at the same time showing the diversity of these tactics, from critical project to transgressive action.

Nomadas Urbonas and Gediminas Urbonas present the Boston Chapter of the Disobedience Archive, curated with Marco Scotini. The work includes a research project, an ongoing archive, and an exhibition produced in collaboration with MIT students, held from December 2011 to April 2012, The Urbonases see the Disobedience Archive as a common space where art and activism can ally with each other in the pursuit of common goals. Developed while Occupy protest encampments were active in downtown Boston and on Harvard University’s campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the project brought together past and present videos, actors, and tactics of art and political action, and in so doing demonstrated the power of the archive to take a political stance. As the Urbonases bring together artists and activists as potential allies, The Yes Men occupy both roles simultaneously. Through video documentation of their media-hijacking actions and the creation of the Yes Lab—a training system and online space to organize offline action—The Yes Men expand their network of supporters into a platform to counter the influence of money in political decisions and to enable social change. Their work challenges definitions of art as action or event by presenting itself as an exclusively activist stance. In these projects, both the Urbonases and The Yes Men operate through action and its documentation. The need to document revolutionary actions takes us to our last section.

After a revolution has past, how is it remembered or restaged? Our final section examines the choices involved in the use of images, texts, and narratives of conflict, including analysis of the curatorial choices involved in their exhibition and display. This group of authors problematizes the ways different instances of representation inevitably imply political choices. In her analysis of Felice Beato’s photograph of Sikander Bagh, Ateya Khorakiwala maps the confrontation of colony and empire in the India uprising of 1857 onto the picturesque aesthetics of the image. This fabricated documentation of ruin and decay, Khorakiwala argues, is an ultimately modern representation. Simone Brott deals with a different kind of modern fabrication. She traces the origins of Le Corbusier’s dictum “Architecture or Revolution,” and proposes it has been misinterpreted. Le Corbusier’s thoughts on revolution, she finds,
linked to ideas of creative destruction and purification in close connection to Italian fascism. These links lend a completely different meaning to the canonical phrase, highlighting modernism’s links to authoritarian states.

Andrés Estefane points out the ways these connections become operative in his analysis of the exhibitions, architecture, and art installations of Chile’s Museum of Memory and Human Rights, opened in 2010 to remember the victims of the dictatorial regime of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Estefane argues that the design and curatorial strategies deployed in the work ultimately link political expression with violence, suggesting the idea of the liberal state as a safe, protective cocoon. Thus the exhibition of resistance becomes a tool to appease revolt. But can we ever properly remember these traumatic events? Kelly Presutti reflects on the task of the historian in her study of Irina Botea’s video Auditions for a Revolution (2006), a piece that re-enacts video taken of the 1989 Romanian revolution. In its engagement with its own making, Botea’s work reveals the inaccuracies of representation, a procedure Presutti finds similar to a literary technique historian Hayden White termed the middle voice. With this strategy, Presutti proposes, the historian is forced to recognize her inability to understand trauma: she acknowledges uncertainty. Presutti both analyzes and performs the middle voice in this historiographical meditation on the impossible yet imperative task of representing revolution. Mechtild Widrich reviews two recent exhibitions framing design as political action—the United States Pavilion contribution to the Venice Biennial and the 9+1 Ways of Being Political exhibition at MoMA, both opened in 2012. In both exhibitions, Widrich perceives an unresolved tension between their institutional support—the state, the museum—and the political activism they catalogue. It is in the brief instances of institutional critique, she suggests, that these exhibitions made their most compelling curatorial choices, signaling potential avenues for future exploration.

Since we began by lifting the paving stones of Paris, we finish by exploring the beach underneath—the promised utopia. Authorial collective Montenegro Airways flies us to this beach in the form of a redesigned Tahiti, where ornament, morality, cleanliness, and pharmaceuticals are strictly regulated. These undercover historians suggest revolutions sometimes lead to unexpected places, and if we’re not careful we might end up stranded in the wrong destination.

Revolution as topic presents unexpected challenges to designers, artists, historians, and curators, and this interaction between the political and the spatial realms must constantly be reevaluated. Street performances, political protests, and design interventions share tactics and reveal unexpected alliances. New publics surface, and we discover old ones never existed. In urban struggle, spectators turn into participants, appropriating sites of assembly or subverting them by creating new ones. Designers and artists involved in protest actions adapt to new and expanded roles, opening themselves to increased collaboration. The afterimages of revolt become new politi-
cal stages, as curators and historians negotiate between critical distance and political choices. Ultimately each of these narratives—in their critical analysis of the interaction between citizens, governments, and the space of the city—can be read as powerful political gestures in themselves. In the ongoing struggle for social justice, thoughtful analysis and historical revision are necessary endeavors—but they necessarily take on some of the qualities of that struggle. Revolution creates increased awareness of our own political position as historians, designers, artists, and curators. It compels us to leave the safety of neutrality and stake our claims, hold our ground, and place our bets.

We introduce this issue with quotations from two revolutionary architects who passed away in 2012: Lebbeus Woods arguing for resistance, and Oscar Niemeyer advocating for change—in society, rather than in architecture. Thus situated between resistance (to the power of the few) and action (the proactive stance of enacting change at structural levels) thresholds 41: REVOLUTION! stands for the enduring capacity of architects, historians, designers, and cultural producers to take a critical stance in the constant reformulation of the commons.
PROLOGUE
THE MOUND OF VENDÔME
DAVID GISSEN

The following petition (written in French and English) was circulated among architects, architectural historians, theorists, and students of architecture throughout the United States and Europe. Historical images of the Mound of Vendôme and images of the reconstructed mound (shown at left) accompanied the petition. The petition, historical images and contemporary images were delivered to the office mentioned below in September of 2012.

PETITION

TO: Mr. Jacques Monthioux,
     Director of Heritage and Architecture, City of Paris
FROM: David Gissen, Associate Professor, CCA
RE: Rebuild the Mound of Vendôme

In May of 1871, members of the Commune de Paris voted to destroy the Vendôme Column—a towering symbol of Napoleonic military might and triumph. In preparation for the demolition, the Communards built a mound of hay, sand, and urban detritus along the ground, directly in front of the column. The mound protected the windows and walls of the neighboring buildings from vibrations as the column was toppled and pulled to the ground.

Following the column’s reconstruction in 1873, various groups have called for the Vendôme Column to be destroyed again. But instead of destroying this rebuilt monument once more, we ask that another reconstruction join the reconstructed column: We, the undersigned, ask that the Mound of Vendôme be rebuilt in the plaza to commemorate the historical and radical events of 1871. The mound is a symbol of revolution and the column’s destruction, but it is also a symbol of the Communard’s interest in urban care, preservation, and the future of their city. It should be built again.
ACTIONS
ROBIN ADÈLE GREELEY

Peña Nieto: the TV is yours; Mexico is ours!
#YoSoy132 banner, June 2012

In May 2012, just weeks before the recent presidential elections in Mexico, a group of students at the Universidad Iberoamericana challenged the presidential candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Enrique Peña Nieto, during his campaign stop at the university. Peremptorily dismissed as being mob infiltrators hired by Peña Nieto’s political opponents, 131 Ibero students posted a video on YouTube displaying their university IDs and reiterating their outrage at the PRI’s persistent autocratic spurning of everyday citizens. The video sparked a spontaneous new grassroots political movement, “#YoSoy132” (“I am 132,” following up on the original 131 students) that rejected the PRI’s authoritarian neoliberalist platform and, in particular, its long history of collusion with powerful news media corporations. In the following weeks, hundreds of thousands of #YoSoy132 protestors repeatedly took to the streets across the country, to demand the democratization of the news media and the liberalization of the political system in Mexico.

#YoSoy132 has regularly been compared to Mexico’s 1968 student movement which, as many have argued, “undermined forever the foundations of authoritarianism in Mexico.” Like their 1968 counterparts, #YoSoy132 has mounted a powerful anti-systemic call for a renewed politics “from below” to counteract the longstanding autocratic cronyism and corruption of the nation’s political leadership. Yet the comparison of #YoSoy132 with 1968 raises profound questions concerning the development of the public sphere in Mexico and its ability to foment a functional democracy. Whereas #YoSoy132 has been tolerated-slash-ignored by the PRI, its 1968 predecessor prompted violent government attacks ending in tragedy. On October 2nd, just ten days before the opening of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, a large student demonstration had gathered in a plaza in the Tlatelolco neighborhood of the city, to demand a democratization of Mexico’s political system that would match the country’s rapid industrialization under the so-called “Mexican Miracle.” On orders from Interior Minister Luis Echeverría and President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, government troops opened fire on the rally, killing several hundred and wounding thousands more. The PRI instituted an immediate information blackout, and mobilized its corporatized support networks towards a show of public condemnation of
the students (Figures 1, 2). This act of state terrorism marked an abrupt end to the 1968 movement’s powerful challenge to the political order imposed by the PRI, and initiated a level of political polarization not seen since the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Under the subsequent dirty war declared by the state, thousands were “disappeared,” or were forced into clandestinity and exile.

In the aftermath of 1968, the combined use of repressive and ideological state apparatuses proved remarkably effective in the PRI’s reasserting its control of the public sphere. Despite state pledges to prosecute those responsible for the massacre, no convictions have ever been handed down, and the PRI has remained extraordinarily powerful. But the state’s open use of brute force in 1968 plunged what has famously been called “the perfect dictatorship” into a crisis of legitimacy—one that even the election in the year 2000 of the first non-PRI president in more than seven decades could not overcome. More than any other event in the twentieth century, the Tlatelolco massacre ruptured the state’s claim as the self-declared heir to the Mexican Revolution’s promise of social justice and political inclusion, to represent the nation’s citizenry. Since 1968, the Tlatelolco killings have festered as an unhealed trauma in Mexico’s public psyche. But they have also prompted numerous responses from civil society aimed at consolidating an operative democratic public sphere. What this essay proposes is to examine one such response—artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s performance-installation project, Voz Alta, commissioned in 2008 on the fortieth anniversary of the massacre—for what it can tell us about the intersection between performative aesthetics, contemporary civil collectivities such as #YoSoy132, and how they might be politically activated in the public realm. My analysis, offered in four short sketches, moves along two principal axes. First is the relationship between aesthetics, social collectivities, and the problem of generating an effective national public sphere out of civil society. Mexico’s historical tendency in the twentieth century to substitute political spectacle for the rational-critical discourse of a functioning democracy is especially pertinent here. A second axis takes up postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s model of public space as the site of performative struggle between state and non-state collectivities involving an aesthetically-determined activation of language. Yet rather than assuming (as does Thiong’o) a public sphere from which concrete political gestures confronting the exercise of state power can be made, I argue that Voz Alta was a more fundamental address to the question of how a relationship between civil society and a democratic political culture could be articulated.

Voices become light; enlightened thought becomes words.
participant, Voz Alta, 2008
Figure 1 Photograph of 2nd October 1968 rally in Plaza de las Tres Culturas, reproduced in La Jornada (Mexico City, 2 October 2008).

Figure 2 La Prensa (Mexico City, 3 October 1968).
Do not suppose that we [the Athenian state] shall... allow you [the tragic poet] to erect your stage in the agora, or introduce the fair voices of your actors, speaking above our own.

Plato, The Laws

A simple proposal: for several hours each night over the course of ten days in 2008, to transform the uncensored voice of the public into powerful light beams that would shine across the vast metropolis of Mexico City (Figures 3-5). Installed in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas on the site of the Tlatelolco massacre, Lozano-Hemmer’s interactive light-sound project invited anyone to speak into a microphone on any topic, completely free of monitoring or censorship. The voices of participants stimulated a searchlight which flashed in response to their frequency and volume, beaming those illuminated voice patterns to the top of the former Ministry of Foreign affairs building (now the Centro Cultural Tlatelolco). Further anti-aircraft searchlights relayed the flashing light beams to three other significant public locations, vastly increasing the project’s visibility to the scale of the entire city: the Zócalo, the traditional political and social heart of the city and the nation since preconquest times; the Basilica of the Guadalupe Virgin, patron saint of Mexico; and the Monument to the Revolution, commemorating the violent 1910-1920 populist upheaval that launched the nation into twentieth-century modernity. The light flashes were then retransformed into sound, transmitted live by radio waves to a listening public via the National University’s radio station. In the pauses between live presentations archival recordings of 1968 music were transmitted, as well as archival testimonials from 1968 survivors, intellectuals and public figures. Thousands from all ranks of society participated, commenting on everything from their memories of the massacre, to calls for political action in the name of freedom and democracy, to poetry and sound art, to marriage proposals. Many called for the prosecution of those responsible for the massacre; many also spoke on the relationship between everyday life and politics. Others pointed to the long-term and consistent state censorship and repression, and to the collusion between the news media and the government in controlling access to information.

Voz Alta’s use of Tlatelolco’s Plaza de las Tres Culturas, a locale deeply imbued with centuries of historical memory from the pre-conquest and colonial periods to the present, as the site of an unscripted performative appropriation of public space for public dialogue on the Tlatelolco massacre conjures up numerous theoretical arguments regarding the relationship between the public sphere and popular performative aesthetics. Participants’ repeated focus on the nexus between art, politics, public space and the state recalls in particular Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s arguments regarding the artist and the state as rivals over the construction and control of public spaces of social interaction. Thiong’o invokes this conflict in terms of stagings of power: “the war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state— in short, enactments of
Figures 3-5 Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Voz Alta.*
*Relational Architecture #15* (Mexico City, 2008).
Central to the idea of performance understood in these terms are issues of time, content and especially place. Struggles over the control of access to spaces of performance, argues Thiong’o, must be seen in relationship to time—what precedes (history) and what could potentially follow (the future). “What memories does the space carry,” he asks, “and what longings might it generate?” Crucially, who controls spatialized memory also controls how political and social discourses are framed in the present and how those discourses shape a collective future.

*Voz Alta* clearly sought to reappropriate Tlatelolco, turning it from a site whose history had been carefully managed by a single voice of authoritative power—the Mexican state—into a public space whose history was the result of a multitude of citizen voices. Lozano-Hemmer’s sound-light piece provided an expanding sensorial forum specifically aimed at bridging temporally and spatially between disparate private thoughts and a collective public discourse that would activate historical memory in the present in all its complexity. As person after person spoke into the microphone, individual soliloquies interwove with each other to produce an ever-thickening web of collective testimonial—a collective witnessing in the public sphere that shattered hegemonic state narratives blaming others—the students, “communists,” rogue political elements—for the Tlatelolco massacre. Individual memories lost their isolated, idiosyncratic character, to become instead nodal points for drawing the past into the present and for marking experiential connections across previously-segregated arenas of civil society. Historical memory became a collective affair, such that even children could testify as community witnesses to events long past.

*From that day onward, Mexico was another country*

Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis

Voz Alta’s performative address to the question of spatialized memory grew out of both the history of 1968 and its effects on cultural production. The PRI’s violent repression of the 1968 democratic movement prompted a sudden and total redefinition of the relationship between culture and the hegemonic political order, turning cultural production sharply from being primarily a state monopoly aimed at institutionalizing official ideologies, to being a form of resistance. As art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina has argued, the state’s attack against the intellectual and middle classes—classes that had previously remained relatively immune to its systematic repression of peasants, indigenous peoples and workers—induced a wide range of aesthetic productions aimed at turning “the violent imposition of power [into] a cultural defeat” for the PRI. Post-68 responses, from writers and intellectuals such as Elena Poniatowska, Octavio Paz, Carlos Monsiváis and José Revueltas, to renegade exhibition practices such as the *Salón Independiente*, to oppositional artistic actions by collectives such as los grupos and the Superocheros, managed to wrest the idea of culture away from restrictive official notions of citizenship and to begin the arduous process of separating the cultural concept of “nation” from the political concept of
“state,” even as they largely could not do so on any other terms except the extremely local and marginalized.

Thus a principle task facing non-official culture after 1968 was that of constructing a national subjectivity along non-hegemonic lines, a citizen-subject outside and against an entrenched state rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism. After 1968, to be an intellectual or cultural producer meant recognizing culture as a category of resistance; it had become ethically inconceivable to endorse the state while engaging in artistic production. Yet while literature, graphics and photography were able productively to grapple with the crisis in the hegemonic cultural order, for the visual arts more generally this proved to be a very difficult, slow and often very negative process. In the immediate aftermath of the killings, the state immediately and effectively moved to incorporate the massacre into its own national historical teleology, presenting it as a “communist plot” and repressing all other versions (Figure 2).

Precisely because of the repressive bases of that national teleology, implemented through a long history of state cooptation of the visual arts, it proved impossible for contemporary artists to rely on those discourses or institutions that had once given the visual arts their representative authority. In rejecting that teleology, contemporary artists found that until the late 1990s alternative models of national subjectivity could not be articulated through official channels at the level of the nation.

A failure of monumentality.
Cuauhtémoc Medina

This long schism, between official culture and contemporary artistic production that de facto placed itself in opposition to the state’s cooptation of the public sphere and the national imaginary, forms the context out of which Lozano-Hemmer produced Voz Alta in 2008. Indeed, this divide has circled for decades around the question of monuments and monumentality. Tlatelolco is full of failed monumentalities; its plaza is delineated by works of great ambition that have singularly failed to live up to their aspirations. On the one hand, Voz Alta stands in deliberate contrast to the sole monument in the square to the 1968 massacre—a stone slab erected in 1993 carrying the few names of those officially confirmed dead (Figure 6). Whereas Voz Alta mobilized the ephemeral, luminosity, sound, and the active involvement of the spectator, the 1993 memorial clings to heavy sculptural anachronisms and a rigid separation of object and viewer. An inert monolith reiterating the outmoded tenets of commemorative statues and plaques, it has proved unable to rejuvenate the plaza as a symbolic public space. A much more spectacular failure of monumentality, however, is that embodied architecturally in the Corbusier-inspired housing complexes of Mario Pani built as shining examples of the Mexican Miracle’s purported economic transformation of Mexico into a fully modernized nation. Pani’s Nonoalco-Tlatelolco urban development reads as an architectural icon to the Mexican regime’s ever more threadbare claim to being the official guardian of the Mexican Revolution’s prom-
ise of social justice and democratic integration into modernity. A deliberate mix of massive functionalist modernism and architectonic references to the monumental imperial architecture of the Aztec, it spectacularized the glories of Mexico’s past as part of a nationalist mythology used to underwrite the PRI's own grasp on political culture. As sociologist Roger Bartra has argued, “government bureaucracy gives the seal of approval to artistic and literary creation, so as to restructure [that creation] in accordance with established canons” of national cultural identity. Generated principally from state mandates, cultural productions such as Pani’s thereby served “an enormously important function in regulating the [national] consensus on which the state is based.” This was starkly in evidence when, on October 2nd, the military effectively used the high-rise housing complexes that border three sides of the plaza to pen in the students, and carry out a wholesale massacre (Figure 2). The sleek modernist buildings designed by Pani instantly dropped any pretense of being architecture for the masses to reveal their coercive role in authoritarian modernization.

By contrast, Voz Alta presented a deliberately anti-monumental “architecture” that countered the authoritarian spectacle of Pani’s complex with an ephemeral “spectacle” of light and sound generated by popular participation. Against Pani’s use of monumental architecture and urbanism to underwrite a state-sponsored social order aimed at channeling and neutralizing popular power, Voz Alta offered an egalitarian model of civic association structured through unscripted collective engagement in public space that articulated the conditions of contemporary civic engagement in public space without monumentalizing them. Light and sound formed a principle measure and structure of that engagement, displacing the tectonic solidity of Pani’s architecture of containment in favor of a spatial demarcation that dialectically detourned spectacle into ephemeral critique. Voz Alta revealed the surreptitious investment in the semiotics of state-sponsored nationalist spectacle upon which the value of the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco housing project was based. It undid the authoritarian nature of that state nationalism through postulating a reversal of the state’s conception of Mexico’s civic masses as passive receivers of the state’s wisdom.

Luminosity translated from sound became the means through which citizens activated their participation in social space. In speaking about his consistent use of light, Lozano-Hemmer has invoked scientific models, particularly contemporary quantum physics, that have a “flexible understanding of the phenomenon of light” in which “observation is complicit with what is observed.” He correlates this with Duchamp’s maxim, “le regard fait le tableau,” to posit an explicitly interactive art that foregrounds the “performative role of the observer.” This sets his work in sharp contrast to precedents such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, who focuses on deconstructing the authoritative power narratives of specific buildings, or to the “cathartic intimidation” of coercive political spectacle embodied in Albert Speer’s Nuremberg “cathedral of light,” even as Lozano-Hemmer uses similar technologies such as powerful anti-aircraft searchlights. Rather, he argues, “personal interactivity [transforms] intimidation...
Figure 6 Monument to the Fallen at Tlatelolco (Mexico City, 1993).

Photo Thelma Datter, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
into ‘intimacy’: the possibility for people to constitute new relationships with the urban landscape and therefore to reestablish a context for a building’s social performance.”

Spaces of social control historically engineered through aestheticization of scientific technological regimes are inverted in Voz Alta: opened outward versus closed-in; fragile, ephemeral pulses of light and sound versus monumental concrete, glass and steel; performative versus static; anti-hierarchical, inclusive and collective versus coercive models of mass society.

The choice to situate Voz Alta in Plaza de las Tres Culturas while simultaneously transforming that situatedness into waves of light and sound that transcendentally enveloped the whole of Mexico City, positions the work within Lozano-Hemmer’s “relational architecture” series. In contrast to Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of “relational aesthetics,” however, Lozano-Hemmer underscores the effects of place in interpersonal interactions, arguing that his works serve as “platforms for participation where the relationship to the political history of the site is as important as the microrelational event between two people who meet in the space.”

“In relational architecture,” he continues, “buildings are activated so that the input of the people in the street can provide narrative implications apart from those envisioned by the architects, developers, or dwellers.” In the case of Voz Alta, this “technological actualization of buildings with alien memory” positioned it in unmistakable opposition to Pani’s architecture, to generated public engagements that differed dramatically from the encounters traditionally authorized within Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The phenomenological immediacy of converting human voices into light beams is posited as an emancipatory experience. Yet the participants in Voz Alta effectively upended any residual reference to Minimalism’s claims to the “radical neutrality of phenomenology” and its dehistoricization of space, to reposition the liberatory phenomenological experience precisely in historical terms that reached simultaneously and collectively towards the past and the future.

The sewers of the PRI are still intact.
Anonymous donor of newly uncovered photographs of the 1968 massacre, 2001

The system has not disappeared; nevertheless, yes, there has been a partial democratization of the State.
Gilberto Guevara Niebla, 2008

Let us now return to Thiong’o’s contention that performative “enactments of power,” which define the nature of the public sphere in terms of a struggle between state and civil actors, are functions of time, content and especially “the performance space: its definition, delimitation, and regulation.” For Thiong’o, however, these elements of performance only acquire their power in relation to audience. Audience provides the connection to “other centers and fields of [social existence]” that activate space, transforming it into “a magnetic field of tensions and conflicts … a sphere
of power ... [in] actual or potential conflictual engagement with all the other shrines of power, and in particular, with the forces that hold the keys to those shrines.” Like Thiong’o, Voz Alta also posited the power of the audience, explicitly rupturing the boundaries between audience and performer in order to bring the disparate fields of social existence represented by its participants together in Plaza de las Tres Culturas. In the process, Lozano-Hemmer’s work transformed what for decades had been a clandestine political memory, and more recently the open subject of journalistic exposés and academic interpretations (but not of legal declarations of guilt), into a larger interrogation of the struggle between state and non-state actors over Mexico’s public sphere. But whereas Thiong’o’s model presumes an already-articulated public sphere over which clash state and civil polities with pre-determined identities, Voz Alta hypothesized deeper systemic questions concerning the definition, formation, and correspondence between civil society and the public sphere.

Sociologist Craig Calhoun has argued that the idea of “civil society” is too often conflated with the idea of democratic political culture in the public sphere, without sorting out how each is defined or how the one relates to the other. Against misleading claims of synonymy, contends Calhoun, it is important to maintain certain conceptual distinctions between “the general discourse of civil society and the more specific notion of a 'public sphere’.” The two concepts are not equivalent. “Indeed,” he continues,

*the importance of the concept of public sphere is largely to go beyond general appeals to the nature of civil society in attempts to explain the social foundations of democracy and to introduce a discussion of the specific organization within civil society of social and cultural bases for the development of an effective rational-critical discourse aimed at the resolution of political disputes.*

Analogously, Voz Alta assumed neither the existence of civil society institutions with predetermined identities nor a direct equivalence between civil society and the public sphere. Rather, it tapped into latent potential communities, unlocking possibilities for those communities to articulate themselves in the public sphere. By opening the microphone to anyone, and refusing to script who could speak on what topics, Voz Alta posited non-hierarchical enactment of political community in the public sphere as a “product, not simply a precondition,” of action in the public sphere. In this model, participation represents not simply the capacity to act or to resolve disagreements; it also embodies the potential for civil groups to transform their own identities and conditions of existence. Voz Alta was never just a performative mnemonics meant to activate the memory of the Tlatelolco killings. Rather than evoking a “necrophiliac” recollection, Lozano-Hemmer argues, time and space come together to link historical precedent to potential futures: “I turn the emphasis onto a living public that may create new memories and relationships, including connections to contemporary massacres that are taking place today.” In other words, the work was also, perhaps
even primarily, a deeper investigation into how to translate civil society to the public sphere, how the social conditions of memory are linked to generating political communities, and how the enactment in the public sphere of those political communities creates in turn the potential for transforming civil identities.

_Voz Alta_’s aim to form democratic political communities through activating social memory in the public sphere takes on heightened importance in relation to the historical conditions of public engagement in Mexico. Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz has noted the longstanding control maintained by the Mexican state over the nation’s purportedly “democratic” public realm. As the corporatized state party, the PRI has for decades commanded a sophisticated system for administering that realm as a space, not of democratic debate, but of spectacularized political ritual aimed at bolstering its own power. “Until very recently,” writes Lomnitz, “Mexico has been a country in which public opinion is subsidized and dramatized by the state.”

By contrast, _Voz Alta_ continues the equally long tradition in Mexico of intellectuals and artists representing national sentiment by “giving meaning and direction to the cacophony of popular social movements.” Channeling such movements bestowed upon intellectuals the authority to represent the broader polity apart from and against governmental representations of public opinion. “In times of unrest,” writes Lomnitz, “appeal to social movements and to revolutions as the privileged sites of public opinion is quite extended, while the capacity to build legitimacy on the productive effects of a state culture of governmentality declines, turning the [agents of the state] into objects of ridicule.” In this regard, both _Voz Alta_ and, subsequently, #YoSoy132, tapped into the energies of popular unrest in the face of government manipulation, providing those energies with a conduit to a generative presence in the public sphere.

But as much as this process is about popular voices struggling against the state to enact a public political identity, so too is it about the changes the state must undergo. Like civil society, the state is neither monolithic nor conflict-free, despite all its efforts to present itself as such. Nor is its hegemony ever fully or irrevocably consolidated. Even as Peña Nieto’s election signals a triumphantly resurgent PRI that shows every sign of reinstating its form of “politics as usual” with a vengeance, movements like #YoSoy132 have opened new—if fragile—parameters for contemporary civic engagement in public space. _Voz Alta_, in plumbing such ongoing dilemmas around social justice and political democratization, reveals the dialectical conditions of performative social engagement as an imperative for mounting a non-spectacularized citizen reclamation of public space.
My thanks to Michael Orwicz for helping me think through these issues.

1 The PRI, under a variety of different names, had continual control of the presidency and the state from 1929 until 2000, when it finally lost the presidency but not control of key states, to the conservative PAN party. For the sake of brevity, therefore, I will sometimes use “PRI” and “state” interchangeably—with a plea to my readers to recognize this as a tacit of rhetorical necessity not conviction. It should also be noted that the PAN, during its twelve years in the presidency, did little to open up the authoritarian political structures the PRI had set into place.

2 The original video is posted in YouTube, see “131 Alumnos de la Ibero responden,” accessed 21 November 2012, http://youtu.be/P7XhocXsFkI.

3 The inclusion of the hashtag in the movement’s name indicates its use of Twitter and other social media as organizing tools. In June 2012, The Guardian reported evidence that Peña Nieto bought favorable television coverage from Televisa while he was governor of the state of Mexico, adding that “The relationship between Televisa and the PRI is as close as it is old. More than three decades ago, Emilio Azcarraga Milmo, father of the incumbent CEO of the firm, defined himself as “a soldier of the PRI.” Luis Hernández Navarro, “Televisa should apologise to Mexicans for its Peña Nieto election bias,” The Guardian 12 June 2012, accessed 21 October 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/12/televisa-mexicans-bias-peña-nieto. Peña Nieto’s presidential campaign is widely seen to have been firmly backed by Televisa, something that is illegal in Mexico. See “Televisa y su candidato atrapados,” Proceso no. 1858 (10 June 2012).


5 #YoSoy132 mounted a presidential debate attended by all candidates of the major parties except Peña Nieto. The #YoSoy132 movement has been characterized by professional politicians from the major parties as a “youth awakening”—a characterization that the venerable historian of the Mexican Revolution, Adolfo Gilly, noted said more about the false sincerity of the “serious” professional politicians than it did about the students. Gilly, “Opinión.”

6 It is now widely recognized that Echeverría was primarily responsible for orchestrating the massacre. Casualties vary enormously and have never been fully confirmed. John Rodda, “The Killer Olympics,” The Guardian 18 August 1972, concluded that more than 300 had been killed, a number that has since been frequently cited. See Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis, Parte de guerra, vols. I and II (Mexico City: Nuevo Siglo/Aguilar, 1999-2002).

7 President Vicente Fox (PAN) was elected against the PRI in 2000, in part on his pledge to prosecute the Tlatelolco criminals—a promise that remained unfulfilled. See “Las promesas incumplidas del presidente Fox” El Mundo 9 December 2001, 28; Carlos Monsiváis, El 68. La tradición de la resistencia, (Mexico City: Editorial Era, 2008); Alfredo Méndez, “Echeverría ni siquiera ha sido llevado ante un juez federal de primera instancia,” La Jornada 2 October 2008). Mexico remained a one-party state for another three decades, losing the presidency momentarily to the conservative PAN party 2000-2012, before regaining it with Peña Nieto’s recent election to office.


14 For example, Grupo Proceso Pentágono’s response to the Seción de Experimentación en 1979 of “hoy no habrá nada” (“today there will be nothing”), on artistic production in response to 1968, see Olivier Debroise, ed., La Era de la Discrepancia/Age of Discrepancies (Mexico City: UNAM and Turner, 2007); Alvaro Vázquez Mantecón, ed., Memorial del 68 (Mexico City: UNAM and Turner, 2007); Medina, “A Ghost Wanders About Mexico: Tlatelolco 1968-2008.”

15 The mass media colluded with the state to present the violent encounter at Tlatelolco as having been provoked by armed communists and “foreign terrorists” under the influence of Chinese and Cuban communist infiltrators of the student movement. See Gilberto Guevara Niebla, La Libertad nunca se olvida. Memoria del 68 (Mexico City: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2004); Alberto del Castillo Troncoso, “El movimiento estudiantil de 1968 narrado en imágenes,” Sociología 23, no. 68 (September-December 2008), 63-114.

16 A major effect of this was that for almost three decades, official institutions did not collect contemporary Mexican art. Not until the late 1990s was this rift between official
institutions of culture and contemporary artistic practice overcome, in large part because of globalization and the international art market rather than from dynamics internal to the country.


19 Paní’s Nonoalco-Tlatelolco complex was championed by President Adolfo López Mateos as a centerpiece of officialist “revolutionary nationalism” in architecture. For a critique, see Cauhtémoc Medina, “La lección arquitectónica de Arnold Schwarzenegger // The Architect lesson of Arnold Schwarzenegger,” Arquín Revista Internacional de Arquitectura, no. 23 (Spring 2003), 68-85.

20 Roger Bartra, Ojocto mexicano (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1993), 32, 102.


22 “There is this intention of amplification to an urban scale. Yet although its there, it’s very frail, ephemeral, and has a tendency to disappear.” Rafael Lozano-Hemmer with Marie-Pier Boucher and Patrick Harrop, “Alien Media” Inflexions 5 (March 2012), 150.

23 Geert Lovink, “Real and Virtual Light of Relational Architecture. An Interview with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer,” in Uncanny Networks Dialogues with the Virtual Intelligentia (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 305. Voz Alta also capitalizes on the history of popular performativity generated in response to the government censorship that erased almost all traces of massacre from the official news media. Students formed ad hoc news brigades, staging street theatre plays and producing posters and flyers to counter the PRI’s disinformation campaign and to disseminate their own concerns and views. Participants in las brigadas noted the connection between performativity, public space, and information circulation: “We were like mobile newspapers.”

Ana Ignacia Rodríguez, quoted in Celeste González de Bustamante, “1968 Olympic Dreams and Tlatelolco Nightmares: Imagining and Imaging Modernity on Television,” Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos 26, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 23. Of course, the interesting parallel of las brigadas with #YoSoy132’s savvy use of social media, particularly Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, should also be underscored.


33 Calhoun, “Civil Society and the Public Sphere,” 269.

34 Calhoun, “Civil Society and the Public Sphere,” 280.

35 Calhoun, “Civil Society and the Public Sphere,” 279. This is especially evident in the several marriage proposals proclaimed by their participants. On the surface, these proposals had nothing to do with politicizing the memory of the Tlatelolco massacre. But it could be argued that they had everything to do with conceptualizing the public sphere as a space for transforming one’s identity and conditions of existence. Calhoun (278) argues that actions like this bring to the fore questions that are fundamental to generating an operative public sphere out of civil society: “How is social integration to be accomplished? How can civil institutions organize themselves such that they might alter patterns of integration or overall exercise of power?”


37 Claudio Lomnitz, Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico, An Anthropology of Nationalism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 233.

38 Lomnitz, Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico, 198. Lomnitz charts the historical circumstances of Mexico’s independence that led to this dichotomy between intellectual and state representations of Mexico’s populations, and its extension into the twentieth century because of the Mexican Revolution.

39 Lomnitz, Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico, 208.

40 It remains to be seen, however, if #YoSoy132 can bridge from its origins in elite urban youth to a wider democratic political constituency. In this regard, the movement must grapple with, to cite Calhoun, how “participation in a democratic public sphere obligates us to develop a good account of the identity of our political communities that faces up to necessary problems of inclusion and exclusion.” Calhoun, “Civil Society and the Public Sphere,” 279.
OCCUPY THE FUN PALACE
BRITT EVERSOLE

During the 1968 holiday season, a dozen people and one Santa Claus impersonator stormed Selfridges, a Daniel Burnham-designed department store on London’s posh Oxford Street. Confused customers gathered when Father Christmas and his helpers pulled goods from the shelves and began giving them away. When clerks intervened, a melee erupted, arrests ensued, and police were forced to make crying children return unpurchased toys and candy. In the aftermath, Londoners found leaflets bearing an anti-consumer diatribe against the holidays as the palliative to another year of pointless labor ending in unaffordable shopping and perfunctory celebration (Figure 1). Chiding Britons that they did not deserve Christmas because they had not worked hard enough, this year’s festivities were a “punishment...a duty to be cheerful, to play the fool, let down your hair as soon as they switch on the lights and raise the curtain.” A call to arms ended the invective:

Let’s smash the whole great deception. Occupy the Fun Palace and really set the swings going. Grab the gifts and really give them. Light up Oxford Street and dance around the fire.1

This vicious potlatch was one of many guerilla actions by the English Situation-ist-inspired group King Mob, named after the 1780 Gordon Riots in which revolting prison inmates freed themselves by the authority of “His Majesty, King Mob.” During the late 1960s, they assaulted British culture with pranks, profane leafleting and poster campaigns, and by vandalizing buildings and infrastructure with erudite phrases, the most famous being a thesis on an Underground embankment: SAME THING DAY AFTER DAY-TUBE-WORK-DINER [sic]-WORK-TUBE-ARMCHAIR-T.V.-SLEEP-TUBE-WORK-HOW MUCH MORE CAN YOU TAKE-ONE IN TEN GO MAD-ONE IN FIVE CRACKS UP. More of an organic idea attached to anonymous actions by a changing cadre than an organized vanguard, this “street gang with an analysis”2 terrorized British culture and counter-culture with humor and bad deeds.

King Mob was formed by Stuart and David Wise, the latter of whom edited the Newcastle review Icteric (1967), and Christopher Gray, who is counted alongside Timothy (T.J.) Clark, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and Charles Radcliffe as the core of the second-wave English SI centered on the pamphlet Heatwave (1966).3 Countless people orbited these circles, such as Malcolm McLaren, The Sex Pistols’s later-manager. Architects were also present, but at the margins: David Wise recalls—and not fondly—Nicholas Grimshaw and Terry Farrell distorting the Newcastle group’s anti-aesthetic writings toward updating architecture’s problems.4 King Mob arose after Guy Debord excluded the English SI in 1967 over a quarrel between the French SI
and the American activists *Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker*, led by Ron Hanhe and Ben Morea who edited the broadsheet *Black Mask* (1966-68).5 By its second issue, *Heatwave* was trumpeting Situationist condemnations of urban planning and spectacular society’s overcoding of daily life (especially Raoul Vaneigem’s writings), as well as the totalizing, revolutionary cultural critique advocated in the Chicago-based Wobbly pamphlet *The Rebel Worker* (1964-66).6 However, requiring different tactics in England and thinking Debord to be more committed to theoretical sophistry than direct action,7 the *Heatwave* circle grew increasingly receptive to the Motherfuckers’ anti-institutional activism against MoMA, Lincoln Center, and Manhattan’s art scene. Their excommunication by Debord for divergences punctuates a time when autonomous, “pro-Situ” affinity groups formed, whose international exchange of tactics warrants greater study. Existing histories cast King Mob as an origin of punk rock or a short-lived inflection of Situationism.8 However, their assault on art and architecture, just when an English youth revolt seemed near, suggests that much remains to be explored of their war on the imaginary of the British neo-avant-garde—the “phony avant-garde”9—whose embrace of technologies of control and mass media placed them at the center of the “spectacular commodity-economy.”

So what to make of King Mob’s call to occupy Cedric Price’s idea for an automated, interactive performance and leisure pavilion? Superficially, it evidences broad awareness of the Fun Palace. Although Price and Joan Littlewood were still unsuccessful in realizing their university of the streets, it was well known to the general public due to opposition to the project, and among the increasingly militant students of design schools.10 Notwithstanding recent analyses that detect anarchist and Situationist tropes in the design (ostensibly reflecting Price’s acquaintance with Alexander Trocchi),11 the Selfridges’s flyer underscores the skepticism that King Mob harbored toward Price’s cybernetic social condenser.

On the other hand, occupying the *unbuilt* Fun Palace—seizing the building’s idea and not leaving it up to Littlewood, Price, or art-house literati to configure it themselves—points to the neo-avant-garde’s power and vulnerability. Similar to an inflammatory King Mob poster celebrating the Communards’ (unsuccessful) burning of the Louvre, to imagine fire-raising London’s commercial district while taking over the Fun Palace highlighted the false dialectic between commodity culture and artistic counter-culture (Figure 2). Obliterating the former would liberate—or kill—the latter. In the process, the Fun Palace—a high-tech empty signifier—would transform from a machine to be viewed into a machine for viewing London afire. Imaginatively occupying one of the neo-avant-garde’s most provocative images pointed to the militant potential of undermining architecture’s own spectacular imaginary.

English Situationists and King Mob condemned sixties neo-avant-garde practices as formulaic, professionalized radicalism valorized by a process of constant recuperation;12 in short, “art is what makes other shit sellable.” This attack was all the more
“IT WAS MEANT TO BE GREAT BUT IT’S HORRIBLE” CONFESSIONS: S. CLAUS 1968

IT’S LIGHTS OUT ON OXFORD STREET THIS YEAR, NO MORE MIDNIGHT MEALS, NO MORE CONSPIRACIES GATHERED FOR COMMUNICATING, TO GRAFT AT THE WORKERS OF CANAL STREET, EVEN THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY CAN NO LONGER KEEP UP WITH ITS ELECTRICITY BILL, YOU DISCOVER CHURCHING. THIS YEAR YOU HAVE NOT WORKED HARD ENOUGH, YOU HAVEN’T TRIED HARD ENOUGH THROUGH THE INPUT-OUTPUT CIRCUIT, OR CLOK-OFF, THE VARIOUS CIRCLES OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION, SPACE AND TIME, RECLAIM YOURSELVES INTO THE GROUND IN PREPARATION FOR THE ONE TIME IN THE YEAR WHEN YOU’RE ALLOWED TO COPY YOURSELVES, REAPPROACH YOURSELVES UNAPPRIZED TO EAT AND ENJOY IT UP IT UP UP AFTERWARDS.

SO THE BRIGHT STONES OF MARKET STREET HAVE TURNED OFF THE LIGHTS THIS YEAR, YOU CAN’T EVEN HIDE THE FACT OF ENJOYING THE GRAY SPECTRE OF CHRISTMAS HAS THE PRICES UP, YOU CAN’T AFFORD THE GIFTS, YOU DON’T DESERVE TO AFFORD THEM BECAUSE YOU HAVEN’T THROWN YOUR GUTS OUT TO KEEP THE TRENDY TURNING.

CHRISTMAS IS A PUNISHMENT THIS YEAR, IT ALWAYS WAS A DANGEROUS DUTY TO BE CHEERFUL, TO PLAY THE FOOL, LET DOWN YOUR HAIR AS SOON AS THEY SWITCH ON THE LIGHTS AND RAISE THE CURTAIN. IT’S A HOILYDAY, AND YOU’D BLOODY WELL BETTER APPRECIATE IT. IT’S A TIME TO BE WITH THE FAMILY AND YOUR BLOODY WIVES BETTER BE NICE TO THEM, BECAUSE WE’RE ALL ONE HAPPY FAMILY, RIGHT ME?

THIS YEAR CHRISTMAS CAN’T EVEN PREFER TO BE FUN, YOU CAN HARDLY AFFORD TO GET PLEASED AND FORGET IT, THEY WANT MORE FROM YOU: MIDDAY THINKS AND SWEETET, AND MORE SMILES AND CRY ON THEY’RE COLD AND TELL US TO THE BLOODY BACK PETS OF ALL THE THINGS THEY TRY TO MAKE US LOOK AT THE KIDS AND BE TERRIFIED TO SING IN CHORUS A WHOLE LOT OF LIES ABOUT LOVE AND PROSPERITY MILKING THE DUTY TO KICK IN ON BATTERY EVEN THOUGH THEY’RE HARDLY LEFT YOU ENOUGH cricket TO KEEP YOURSELF A CAPTAIN BAYONET OUT OF IT ALL.


I’ve been a good Irish Catholic girl, never sinned never...

Christ, I’m pleased of it all

the fucking family, the convent, the convent

all these sissies, all these sissies, all these sissies

I want the pill

I want to be erotic

...anything

Figure 1 King Mob handbill, “It was meant to be great but it’s horrible,” Confessions: S. Claus 1968.

Figure 2 King Mob poster, “The Communards burn the Louvre. The most radical artistic act of the nineteenth century,” 1968.

Figure 3 King Mob cartoon, “I’ve been a good Irish Catholic girl, never sinned never...” 1968.

Figure 4 Richard Brendan Bell, King Mob LSE Occupation Posters, “Keep the Dialectic Open,” and “Puritanism will Castrate our Revolution,” 1968.
pointed in Pop Art’s homeland, where puritanism and class divisions perpetuated a
dotty civility and canned eccentricity whose affectations lingered in the Independent
Group’s progeny and artists associated with London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts
(ICA).13 Similarly, social and political theory were frequently just a way of oxymo-
ronically legitimating dissidence as cultural cachet instead of encouraging action.
Theory had also become descriptive and incapable of confronting technological
rationalism.14 This fall into description complimented British tendencies toward posi-
titivism and empiricism, in which intellectual work was harnessed to solve problems,
or dismissed for lacking immediate solutions. Aesthetics were at a dead end, too.
The return of the historical avant-gardes in their most de-potentiated forms—tech-
nological anachronism and stylistic nostalgia—blunted what King Mob perceived to
be Dada’s most powerful propositions: anti-aestheticism and revolt.15 Conversely,
the drive to question and to provoke alterity had been abandoned in favor of art as
entertainment and architecture as pragmatically predictive.

King Mob arose, in part, from a need for new methods for confronting the neo-a-
vant-garde’s tyranny. As Vaneigem wrote in Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes
générations (1967), you could not sit by like a “passive nihilist,” wallowing in the
death of values and art; you had to act to move things along by any means neces-
sary. “The active nihilist does not intend simply to watch things fall apart. He intends
to speed up the process. Sabotage is a natural response to the chaos ruling the
world.”16 Taking a cue from Vaneigem, King Mob situated direct action not in Conti-
nental theory’s high-minded formulations, but in the irrationality of “juvenile delin-
quency,” which provided a means and measure for developing tactics for defacing
culture.17 Among them, three are worth considering further: graphics and aphorisms
as attacks on the image; hacking theory; and satirizing the neo-avant-garde.
King Mob often détourned cartoons and advertisements, overlaying onto found
photographs poetic and erotic rants that collided with the image itself to produce
“riot and shock through incomprehensibility” (Figure 3).18 Similarities to French
Situationist techniques notwithstanding, they assailed British Pop’s celebration of
advertising. King Mob acknowledged patrimony to the found images in Richard
Hamilton’s collages. However, by the latter half of the sixties, “collecting ads” no
longer provoked English sensibilities. Against Pop’s aesthetics, King Mob also pro-
duced vulgar graphics and cartoons, inspired by imagery in Black Mask, The Rebel
Worker, and by the Dutch Provos. Their line drawings and bold figures printed well
on Gestetner machines, whose deep blacks and saturated colors characterized the
era’s protest posters. King Mob’s designs were known for their use of profanity and
explicit drawings, such as the cartoons of oversized genitals and defecation juxta-
posed with militant rhetoric found on posters made for a London School of Econom-
ics occupation (Figure 4).19 In spite of accusations of immaturity and misogyny, they
wagered that crass would jar English sensibilities and offend student groups and the
institutional left.20

King Mob’s theatrics, posterings and vandalisms—from plans to ironically dynamite
a waterfall to publishing a hit-list of British artists—played out in public space, and were intended to provoke social, affective reactions in people encountering them. Illustrating Alain Badiou’s theories, these actions were events only because there were effects: in this case, the re-introduction of narratives of disruption and alterity that were devalued by the presentism of commodity culture. These effects were intensified by the anonymity of their actions—insofar as anyone could be King Mob, anonymity encouraged popular emulation. One of their successes was demonstrating the potential of do-it-yourself, bottom-up, graphic warfare, proving that anyone can deface culture. Certainly, it was problematic that anonymous urban disruptions mirrored terrorism and were indistinguishable from simple crime. Yet King Mob refused to condemn outright petty theft or collective violence; from the Amsterdam and Watts riots to the youth crime wave afflicting England, anti-social acts were to be analyzed as evidence of social ills.

The rants and drawings plastered onto buildings express what David Wise calls King Mob’s “anti-theory” (Figure 5). Whereas they challenged how complacent readers passively consumed literature and philosophy—they once painted “Don’t Read” on a library—they understood that direct action requires thought. From Situationist standbys—Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Bakunin, Breton, Lautréamont, and De Sade, who wrote “Crime is the highest form of sensuality”—they drew ammunition in the form of “willfully provocative statements.” Aphorisms de-contextualized and redeployed to disfigure public space were “libidinal vandalism”—desire explored through performative, didactic transgression. To paraphrase Julia Kristeva, what King Mob perpetuated was a “culture of revolt,” where revolt is understood less in its political sense as a unique, violent act and more in its etymological field as a “deep movement of discontent, anxiety and anguish” grounded in experiences of “division, conflict, pleasure and jouissance” that yield return, repetition and renewal.

The first issue of the review King Mob Echo included a polemical poem titled “The Return of the Repressed” by Norman O. Brown—author of the classic Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (1959)—that affirmed the aphorism’s capacity to rupture reason and the “reality-principle:”

We have been told that the medium is the message
Aphoristic form has political or rather metapolitical implications—

... Aphorism is instant dialectic
the instantaneous flip instead of the elaborate system

Only so do we have a form of intellect that is so easy
that any child could do it
or, only a child can do it

And so perishable
that it cannot be hoarded by any élite
or stored in any institution
A form of dialectics, therefore, unequivocally on the
side of freedom
or madness. 26

Insofar as much theory was too complex for direct use, it had to be subjected to
subversive, creative hacking for antagonistic ends. 27 Unlike other activist practices
during this period, such as Italian intellectuals reading Capital with factory workers,
there were no delusions of working-class Brits somehow enlightening themselves
through reading. If Debord, like Nietzsche, showed the communicative potential
of the thesis, King Mob radicalized it into the slur, the profanation and the attack,
setting into motion the aphorism’s reverberating effects: fleeting and memorable,
lucid and indeterminate, aphorisms travel at the speed of images but linger after the
image disappears.

It would be wrong to suggest that King Mob’s “anti-theory” yielded no sophisticated
writing. Many short essays were produced, although most were read aloud or pub-
lished in ephemeral ‘zines and as handbills, forms that were tailor-made for targeting
England’s youth. Defining modernity as an array of mental pathologies requiring the
embrace of madness and depravity to combat them, King Mob hacked Freud, whose
terminology had long enjoyed popular status, to highlight how authorities use psy-
chiatry to label and marginalize “undesirables.” Rather than the Marxist messianism
that the proletariat is modernity’s chosen people, the new mass movement would
mine the psychological afflictions of England’s youth. Their disaffection was exacer-
bated by image and commodity culture, as well as by the banal rationality of urban
planning that was erasing the unique qualities of England’s working-class towns and
alienating Brits from their environment. Anticipating Watts- and Amsterdam-style
riots, they solicited “delinquents” and “mentals” and argued that the “mods and
rockers” were the new lumpenproletariat, which they represented as a werewolf, a
humorous allusion to Freud’s Wolf Man (Figure 6). 28 They jokingly declared that, in
order to open up theoretical and practical lines of communication to the margins of
society, they wanted to create a “comprehensive network of Anti-Social Services, de-
dsigned to combat the system’s efforts to conceal its structural weaknesses by means
of a unified ideology and practice of Welfare” (Figure 7). 29 Formulating a “self-con-
sciously delinquent lifestyle” was a means of combating the “partial rationality” of
technological society.

It made sense to attack the British neo-avant-garde for illustrating the welfare state’s
reforms. After Pop had productively introduced into art the popular, the cheap, the
mass-produced, the sexy, and the expendable, British art remained safely in the
museum, aesthetically enshrining consumerism and kitsch. The “youth” of Pop had
withered, and museums—especially the ICA—had become temples to professional-
Figure 5 Photographs of King Mob graffiti, London, 1968. “All you need is dynamite,” which punned the 1967 Beatles song “All You Need is Love,” underscores King Mob’s perspective that it is “better to be horrible than a pleasant, altruistic hippy.” Photographer unknown, reproduced from Tom Vague, King Mob Echo (2000).

Figure 6 King Mob cartoon, “Werewolf,” 1969.

Figure 7 Dave Barbu (pseudonym), “Urban Gorilla Comes East.”
ism that had to be burned.\textsuperscript{30} Among the targets of the English SI’s ire, architecture ranked high because it exemplified the commodity-economy’s empty promise of social renewal. The archeologizing of modernism and the historical avant-gardes as a collage of formal citations combined with a burgeoning technophilia to give reform a persuasive, youthful image, wrapping aesthetic innovation around a center-left rhetoric of progress. Even Constant’s New Babylon, described as a “fully modernized concentration camp,” was seen as complimenting the Provo retreat from their earlier revolutionary ideas (ideas the English had admired) into reformist governance.\textsuperscript{31} No one embodied this conservatism more than Archigram, “The Playboys of the Bourgeoisie,” whose collages King Mob cast as morbidly pragmatic:

\textit{Neither will the recent technological trend in what’s left of architecture alleviate it. Needless to say, Architecture is Dead too. Nonetheless, Archigram’s Plug-in city and the pre-fabrication which preceded it, will still be imposed upon us. Again, we’ll have no say in this. Again, only men barren of life will have the right to decide our environment for us. Let’s face it: have you ever been to an architect’s party which has ever got off the ground? Standardisation in so-called communist or capitalist countries has suppressed free creativity. In fact, free creativity is now regarded as a pathological condition by the status quo. What architect for instance, would think of the possibilities of fire within a city?}\textsuperscript{32}

King Mob showed Archigram’s disposable culture to already be a reality, one to be imposed, in all its shoddiness, on those who could not afford otherwise. The architectural neo-avant-garde’s exuberant graphics and naïve political rhetoric distracted from the reality that these supposedly dynamic and modifiable architectures legitimized the cheapening of the environment.

Their disdain for Archigram generated one of King Mob’s most original graphics, drawn by David Wise, which lampooned Dennis Crompton’s \textit{Expendable City} (1963) and \textit{Computer City} (1964) as architecturally banal, racially segregated cities (Figures 8, 9). Wise’s drawing attacked a recent master plan for a central business district of office towers and shopping areas laced with freeways in Newcastle, known for its arts scene and working-class population. Declaring Archigram’s logics of expendability, interchangeability, and maximalization to be identical to any developer’s or technocrat’s methods, they appropriated Crompton’s imagery to redraw the Newcastle plan as a series of repetitive, linked towers forming neighborhood enclaves of poverty, such as a “Sub-aryan ghetto” and a “Sub-cretinous area at insufficient level.” Radiating from a governmental core of drive-in institutions, the city was networked with highways to nowhere. Further abuse of Archigram and Cedric Price took the form of parodying their techno-pop terminology: just as Crompton labeled his urban-information highways “Metropolitan Pressure Area Zonal Feed,” “Primary Feed,” and “Primary Return,” King Mob mockingly gave their roads equally opaque, grammatically confused and profanity-laden names: “Metro-proletarian harass zone,” “High
**Figure 8** Dennis Crompton (Archigram), “Expendable City.”

**Figure 9** David Wise, King Mob handbills with Archigram satire, 1968.
pressure: a zonal no return,” “Highway to technological blitzkrieg number one” and “Riot control sector | unfreeway.” Minor routes include, “Super commodity survival kit input belt | electrographic architecture unit low level arterial highway” and “A non no connecting thinkbelt | input output feedback turnabout fuck off route.” An inventive translation of Vaneigem’s and Attila Kotányi’s “Unitary Urbanism” tract captioned the drawing: “We have to propagate suspicion and subversion of those identical, air-conditioned, brightly coloured kindergartens, the new dormitory cities of both East and West. It is time to murder sleep.” The sixties pod and megastructural fetishes—often described by historians as futuristic environments laden with anxieties about ecological disaster—were given a darker interpretation: these dynamic utopias were no more than future bidonvilles, clad in shiny plastic envelopes, whose units were as disposable as their residents.

Of course, it would be easy to dismiss the satirizing of Archigram, and most of King Mob’s actions, as the immature stunts of hooligans (which they were), as less sophisticated than Debord’s and Vaneigem’s theorizations, or, more generally, as reactionary nihilism in which any projective design is condemned as a superstructural prop. It is equally easy to object that King Mob’s admirers overstate the influence of an inconsistent group that largely disbanded after two years. However, a nod in the irreverent architectural ‘zine ARse suggests at least some immediate impact, and an explicit continuation of their efforts against English technocratic planning is found in the cutting collages and Situationist reprints in Jamie Reid’s Suburban Press (1970-75).

Yet their mischievous occupying of the dominant imaginary of the British art and architectural neo-avant-garde—introducing destabilizing narratives of revolt into and against these disciplines to reveal their bankruptcy—might be their most important lesson. King Mob’s was not an easy “no” to art; it was a lateral, dynamic insurgency employing graphic and performative tactics to undermine England’s vanguard and popular counterculture as a way to overcome the difficulty of saying “yes” to a culture of revolt. Their activism drew a clear line against professional radicalism—which for architects is often indistinguishable from radical professionalism—and their do-it-yourself style and refusal of organizational hierarchy or romantic heroism suggested a participatory militancy that repudiated theoretical dogmatism. They were not the only group doing this kind of activism, nor were they the last. Yet revisiting King Mob today amidst the spate of hagiographies of the neo-avant-garde’s so-called radical architecture suggests that allowing more space to period detractors, as well as problematizing the exquisite image-making of the sixties as neither utopian nor dystopian but as utterly pragmatic—i.e., keeping the dialectic open—is both an important historical project as well as a means to highlight how historians today are increasingly called upon to contribute to the economy of architectural fame.

Foucault’s admonition that you don’t have to be sad to be militant captures the spirit
of King Mob’s tactics of savage humor, appropriation, low-tech reproduction, profanity, and delinquency. These tactics complimented their hacking of theory, which made irrelevant the false choice between embracing theory or rejecting it for action. Instead, they showed how theory, just like the neo-avant-garde’s own techniques, could be mischievously and provocatively held hostage, abused, altered, and weaponized. If Clark and Nicholson-Smith are correct when they predict that Situationism will continue to inform future projects of resistance, King Mob demonstrates that even in its heyday, the Situationist International had sparked rich and varied local adaptations of its basic tactics that, at the same time, also need to be studied separately from the precedents from which they derived. Tactics and techniques do not live and die with their creators or recuperators; the efficacy of their effects, and not the tactics themselves, is related to the context in which, and targets against which, they are deployed. King Mob’s project of satirically and brutally seizing the dominant imaginary in order to reveal its weakness, its limitations and even its falsehoods is one that can be seized anew. Which projects should be occupied today?
I would like to thank David Wise for his encouraging comments and helpful clarifications, as well as for his recollections of other actions and incidents that for reasons of length could not be included here. Also, thank you to Enrique Ramirez for his keen eye, to Claire Zimmerman for her suggestions and pointed criticism, and to Ana Maria Leon and the thresholds team for their thoughtful editorial work.

1 Unsigned King Mob handbill, ‘It was meant to be great but it’s horrible,’ Confessions: S. Claus 1968.

2 Unsigned, “Affinity Group—A Street Gang with an Analysis,” King Mob Echo 5 (1970). Affinity groups are non-hierarchical collaborations between activists, focused less on individuals than on group actions around common ideas and tactics. The idea had been promoted earlier in the militant sheet Black Mask (see note 6).

3 The Situationists were no strangers to England. The best known British member was Ralph Rumney, who was present at the SI’s founding, though he was expelled in 1957. The Scotch-Italian Alexander Trocchi was also a significant contributor, even after his 1964 exclusion. The fourth SI meeting occurred in London in 1960, ending with a rancous panel at the ICA moderated by Independent Group artist Toni del Renzio. The influence of these pioneers on Heatwave and King Mob, however, is minimal and less significant than their ideas and tactics. The idea had been promoted earlier in the militant sheet Black Mask (see note 6).


5 See the journal Black Mask (numbers 1-10, 1966-68), and Ron Hahn and Ben Morea, Black Mask and Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahn, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group (Oakland: PM Press, 2011).

6 The Rebel Worker (1964-66) was published by the Chicago-based activist Franklin Rosemont. The mimeographed pamphlet combined organizational propaganda, cultural criticism, beat poetry and translations of French Surrealism. See Franklin Rosemont, “To be Revolutionary in Everything: The Rebel Worker Story,” in Rosemont and Radcliffe, 1-82.


9 Tim Clark, Christopher Gray, Charles Radcliffe and Donald Nicholson-Smith, “The revolution of modern art and the modern art of revolution,” (unpublished manuscript, 1967), reprinted in Vague, King Mob Echo, 63-7. All citations refer to the Vague reprint. The English SI referred to postwar art movements as false avant-gardes or as empty, purely aesthetic returns of earlier avant-gardes. In this text, “neo-avant-garde” will be used to refer to postwar art practices that appropriated the techniques (collage, montage, etc.) and even the names of prewar movements.

10 As in other countries, sixties England also witnessed union actions and university occupations. King Mob took interest in the London School of Economics Student Union (LSE), a particularly active group. However, unhindered by illusions of a student-worker alliance, King Mob’s actions were more generally directed at agitating disaffected British youth. For this reason, comparisons with the events of May 68 are less informative than their self-identification with.
riots in American urban ghettos or the 1966 Amsterdam uprising. For non- and sometimes anti-Situationist documents of students and the English radical left, see David Wedgery, ed. The Left in Britain: 1956-68 (Baltimore: Penguin, 1976).


12 “We have used the word recuperate, which means recover the activity of society as it attempts to obtain possession of that which negates it.” Robert Chasse, et al., “Faces of Recuperation,” Situationist International 1 (1969). Though recuperation was not theorized until later, the problem of the internalization of opposition is detectible in earlier Situationist texts.


14 The Lettrists were early critics of technological reason overwhelming individual invention. On the other hand, until the early 1960s, Situationists still allowed a role for technologies of automation in realizing the new city. However, by the mid 1960s, their criticism of computational and electronic technologies of control took on a skeptical tone. It is difficult to conclude that Situationists were able to see a scenario in which technologies of urban management were anything other than a roadblock to the revolution of everyday life.

15 See Christopher Gray and Charles Radcliff, “All or Not at All! Editorial,” Heatwave 2 (October 1966). The second and final issue of Heatwave was dedicated to translating Dada and Surrealist texts that the editors considered to be emblematic of the historical avant-garde as the “last radical period of the revolutionary movement.”


17 It is important to note that Vaneigem, in Traité de savoir-vivre…, questioned any tactics that are burdened by moral constraints or over-theorization. “The only modern phenomena which can be compared with Dada are the most savage outbreaks of juvenile delinquency. The same contempt for art and bourgeois values, the same refusal of ideology, the same will to live. The same ignorance of history, the same barbaric revolt, the same lack of tactics.”

18 Wise, “A Hidden History of King Mob (Conclusion).”

19 There were English precedents for King Mob’s graphics, such as International Times and the lush counterculture broadsheet Oz. Even though Oz encouraged (mis)conduct like King Mob, the latter derided Oz’s fashionable status. King Mob’s posters were rejected by the occupation committee in favor of “a stage-managed repetition of the French May Days posters, largely irrelevant to the English situation.” King Mob still hung the posters at the LSE and in London, which infuriated left wing parties who, as intended, were offended by their vulgarity. See Unsigned King Mob folio, “Posters Rejected by the L.S.E. October 27th to October 27th” (1968).

20 “The new revolution may be obscene and blasphemous; it must deface the power structure when it cannot destroy it; the criterion is defiance not discipline…Our movement is symbolized by the bomb-thrower, the deserter, the delinquent, the hitch-hiker, the mad lover, the school drop-out, the wildcat striker, the rioter and the saboteur.” Charles Radcliff, “A Very Nice Very Respectable Very Useless Campaign,” The Rebel Worker 6 (1966), n.p.

21 King Mob and the splinter group The Black Hand Gang produced a hit-list of artists, titled “The Death of Art Spells the Murder of Artists. The Real Anti-Artist Appears.” After Andy Warhol’s name (crossed out to indicate the recent, unsuccessful attempt on his life by Valerie Solon), the list included Richard Hamilton, Yoko Ono, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan and David Hockney, as well as Mike Kustow (director of the ICA) and other British pop stars.

22 Regarding problems of confusing the Mob’s vandalism with petty crime, see Wise, “A Hidden History of King Mob (Conclusion).” Regarding the diagnostic value of petty crime, see Tim Clark et al., “The revolution of modern art and the modern art of revolution,” 69. For the Situationist analysis of the Watts Riots, see “Le déclin et la chute de l’économie spectaculaire-marchande,” Internationale Situationniste 10 (1966); first translated as a pamphlet (and distributed in the United States before the French version), titled The Decline and Fall of the “Spectacular” Commodity-Economy, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Frontier Press, 1965).

23 Wise, “A Hidden History of King Mob (Conclusion).”

24 Wise, “A Hidden History of King Mob (Conclusion).”


27 I am indebted to Mireille Roddier for enlightening me with...
her translation of détournement as “hacking.”

28 See Franklin Rosemont, “Mods, Rockers and the Revolution,” The Rebel Worker 3 (Spring 1965); and Charles Radcliffe, “The Seeds of Social Destruction.” Radcliffe’s survey of British youth groups included Teddy Boys, Ton-up Kids, Beats, Ban the Bombers, Ravers and the Mods and Rockers. For the British SI, however, these categories were the domestic expression of the global disaffection present in youth groups such as: stilyagi (USSR), blousons noirs (France), and the Provos (Holland). The werewolf is King Mob’s version of “a Motherfucker”—a youth who cannot be constrained by institutions of social control, and who transforms into an irrational and uncontrollable monster, threatening the stability of society and rejecting any expectation of a “reasonable” resolution to his demands.


31 “[The] fragmentary and reformistic theory of the [Provo] leaders is the complete denial of the radical opposition implicit in the street riots, an opposition which was total, irreconcilable and practiced by everyone....As it is, the only reflection their poetry and taste for adventure has found in official theory is in Constant’s ‘New Babylon,’ where it appears as an appendage to his plans for a fully modernized concentration camp, the world, he assures of, of homo ludens. Constant is about as ‘ludic’ as an ox.” Christopher Gray and Charles Radcliffe, “The Provo Riots,” Heatwave 2 (October 1966). Contrast Gray and Radcliffe’s views with evaluations of New Babylon in Simon Sadler, The Situationist City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Constant and Mark Wigley, Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998); and Mark Wigley and M. Catherine de Zegher, The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant’s New Babylon to Beyond (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).


33 David Wise, King Mob flier. A variant of the Archigram parody exists with a slightly different drawing and a full translation of “Unitary Urbanism.” The caption reads: “For Archigram: Playboys of the Bourgeoisie. This group’s only purpose is to streamline capitalist oppression. Peter Cook himself proclaims ‘the ingenuity of the architectural to concept exploit the maximum profits from a piece of land’...whereby...finance can be made into a creative element of design rather than a restrictive element!!!” R.I.P.”

34 For a détournement of King Mob Echo 1 (and a satire of Archigram), see ARse—Architects for a Really Socialist Environment or Whatever You Want to Call Us 3 (May 1970): Red Paper 2 insert. Jamie Reid’s Suburban Press took the town of Croydon as its subject, assailing redevelopment and land speculation problems similar to those in Newcastle. See Jamie Reid and Jon Savage, Up They Rise: The Incomplete Works of Jamie Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

Author's note: Carlo Ginzburg once wrote that to the extent that he had a model in mind for what came to be known as microhistory—the genre with which he is most associated—it was Tolstoy’s War and Peace. How is one to write to the simultaneity of factors that determine an event? In Tolstoy’s fiction, Ginzburg observed, the multiple structures and relationships that intersected at Austerlitz and Waterloo could be linked together precisely in its contempt for the conventional history of historians. Only in fiction, could one simultaneously imagine the thoughts going through Napoleon’s head as well as the temperament of the troops, and portray them as if in a global, bird’s-eye image. The battle scene, with its clash of multiple worlds, of ideas, actions, technologies, catenaries, politics, social dynamics, and the private and public world of individuals, in this sense remains the exemplar for what the historian construes as “event.” More to the point, the event, in its multidenominational character and its irreducible unexpectedness, is precisely what resists capture along the lines of whatever lines of ‘interest’ the historian may seek to expose. “No human eye will ever succeed in catching contemporaneously... the historical specificity (real or presumed) of a battle and its cosmic irrelevance. A battle, strictly speaking, is invisible.” Those amongst my generation of Indians who aspire or purport to be historians or social commentators have “lived in interesting times”; willy-nilly, they have had to live out a social war of sorts: the rise of religious fundamentalism in South Asia. In living out that ongoing war, I was fortunate in coming close to a small organization, Sahmat, that was particularly active in engaging that conflict. My friends in Sahmat impelled me to reconstruct, from its immaculately kept archives, some of the facets of that interecine conflict. The book from which this extract is taken is an attempt to peer into that invisibility. The excerpt given here is unexcised, and recapitulates in its most part the events of one day in Delhi, seen through its prelude and aftermath in preceding and ensuing months.

January 1, 1989

Sahibabad is a hodgepodge of semi-legal industrial units and unauthorized workers’ bastis, only some fourteen kilometers to the northeast of Delhi, but actually situated in the Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh. The worker’s movements in this area strongly owe allegiance to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the trade union group affiliated with the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), the most
prominent communist party in the Indian electoral fray. Over the preceding years, the environs of Delhi have become an angry battleground, following two major industrial actions in these industrial areas, a three-day general strike in November 1987, and then a significantly more ambitious and far-reaching seven-day strike in November 1988. CITU officers have been conscious of the rapidly changing profile of industrialization in the region under the Rajiv Gandhi administration. Although the CPI-M lacks an electoral presence in the city, CITU’s widespread reach amongst the working population has triggered tensions with the ruling Congress’s increased resort to street toughs—goondas—to fill their political ranks at the lower echelons, helmed by two thuggish Delhi political fixers honed during the Emergency era: H. K. L. Bhagat and Sajjan Kumar.

Indrani Mazumdar’s exquisite and extensive study of the labor organizational files of this period gives us a blow-by-blow account of the events and organizational efforts that led to the landmark strike of November 1988. In her account, the CITU files of the period offer “a sketchy but eloquent record of the initial process by which the spreading torpor in the trade union movement was broken by the CITU leadership which was pushing for a line of building a movement.”

Early in 1986, the greater-than-expected response to CITU industrial actions in the region had apprised its officers of the possibility of a major action on the issue of the minimum wage. In addition to the pressures of heightened migration and sordid living arrangements, general governmental policy collusion with the factory maliks had kept the minimum statutory wage in 1988 at Rs. 489 (approx. USD 28) per month, up from Rs. 300 in 1982. In the same period, Mazumdar calculates the consumer price index as having risen by 334 points, which means that nominal increases in wage rates fell significantly behind general inflation levels. By contrast, the Net Value Added (NVA) in the small scale sector rose from Rs. 36.35 crores in 1972 (USD 48.5 million) to Rs. 396.17 crores (USD 226 million) in 1987-88, which meant that each worker was producing a surplus of Rs. 23,000 (USD 1314) for the year 1987-88, more than three times the unskilled worker’s mandated wage and twice that of skilled workers. In any case, the mandated wage was seldom paid; the maliks’ economic coercion was further exacerbated with increased police repression as liberalization efforts in the Rajiv era sought to break the back of labor organizations.

The three-year prelude to the 1988 strike is a study in the relationship between the organizational efforts of CITU, its sibling and rival outfits in the communist and Congress party and trade union offices, and the inchoate tide of worker anger. As a formal goal, the agitation coalesced under a demand to raise the minimum wage to Rs. 1,050. The coordinated organizational efforts by CITU and the CPI-M involved bringing out posters and leaflets numbering three-quarters of a million. Up to one thousand “street corner” meetings across the length and breadth of the region between party officials, local organizers and neighborhood volunteers rehearsed gherao (picketing) strategy, juloos (march) routes, and retreat options based on
expected participation and ferocity of police response. Organizers went into the factories and the *jhuggis*, sought support from unions in the formal sector, drumming up support for the forthcoming strike. Commencing on November 22, the strike shut down industrial activity in the entire region, drawing the participation of 1.5 million workers, making the seven-day strike the largest industrial action in the history of Delhi. Increased dissatisfaction with the Rajiv administration also brought out the media and the intelligentsia in support, a factor which substantially stayed the strong arm of the law when acting against the militant workers. The outcome of the strike can be evaluated in various ways, not least being the heightened awareness and consciousness amongst the workers in terms of legal rights and benefits, catalyzing a brief moment of coordinated action that would become increasingly unavailable as the decade wore into its next. The principal success of the strike was the government’s response to raise the minimum wage to Rs. 750, in addition to the concession of routine dearness allowance pro-rated to rises in the consumer price index.

In analytical terms, the strike revealed as much the tremendous organizational energy of the halcyon days of trade unionism as it exposed its limits. The demands of the strike had been directed towards the government, using the formal goal of the minimum wage as its clarion call. On the one hand, this recentered the State as the political representative of the people at large, while tentatively demonstrating the relevance of standards used for the formal workplace in the larger context of informal employment. At the same time, the protean work of coordination carried out by CITU and communist cadres significantly revealed the cognitive difficulty of articulating the economic target of industrial action in the informal sector. In ensuing years, the thrust of liberalization would simply whittle away statutory power in industrial relations, eroding both the wherewithal and the inclination to enforce legal standards in industry.

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Founded in 1973, Jan Natya Manch (People’s Theatre Front), or Janam (birth) for short, is one of the CPI-M’s cultural “fronts,” aimed at creating greater awareness of working class struggle through the medium of street theatre, a particularly versatile and adaptive art form germane to both proselytization and organization activity. In the period leading up to the November seven-day strike, the troupe staged twenty-eight performances of a play, *Chakka Jam*, written particularly for the occasion. In keeping with its political beliefs, the troupe shuns the elite purveyors and pro-sceniums of central Delhi, going instead to the industrial areas, the *jhuggis*, and factory gates to find its audience. By the winter of 1988, Janam has given, since its inception, about 4000 performances of its 24-play repertoire. The de facto leader of the troupe is founder member Safdar Hashmi. He has an M.A. in English and is an alumnus of Delhi’s elite St. Stephen’s College, alma mater alike of Bhaskar Ghose, chief of Doordarshan (the Indian state television body), the author Amitav Ghosh.
and historian Ramachandra Guha, the Congress politician Kapil Sibal, the neoclassical economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the CPI-M member Sitaram Yechury, media mogul Samir Jain, the Hindu right-wing columnist Swapna Dasgupta, and Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, the Islamicizing former president of Pakistan. In the prelude to the strike, Hashmi has been active amongst the city’s intelligentsia, art and media circles, apprising them of the goals of the strike, soliciting their support. Hashmi’s initiative has been crucial in organizing a large march of artists and intellectuals in support of the strike. Public statements by this section proved critical, bringing media visibility to the events of the strike, emboldening worker participation, and forcing police and Congress goons to keep a low profile.

Energized by November’s success, today, on New Year’s day, 1989, Janam is performing *Halla Bol*, an adapted version of *Chakka Jam* in Ambedkar Park in Jhandapur village, Sahibabad. Hashmi is watching in the audience. Ever the food-lover and gourmand, the night before, he had enticed troupe members to explore a new culinary find in the storied streets of old Delhi: *laal roti* and *korma*. At one point the play, expressly scripted to rally workers to CITU’s umbrella, stages altercations between CITU-affiliated performers and their opponents that amounts to a morbid premonition of events shortly to come. “*Natak roko! Yahan koi naara nahin, koi jhanda nahin. Is ilaake mein CITU ka naam nahin liya jaana chahiye.*” (Stop the play! No slogans, no flags here, CITU’s name should not be taken in this area.) While the play is being performed, a procession headed by Mukesh Sharma, a local factory-owner and Congress-affiliated aspirant for local political office, halts the play, demanding that the procession be let through. With the play due to be over shortly, Hashmi intercedes, requesting that the procession wait until the play was over. Sharma and his henchmen ostensibly agree. In actuality, grudges from November fresh in their minds, they call up reinforcements. An armed mob with sticks and guns drives up in a bus. They attack the audience and the performers, who disperse in panic. In the subsequent course of events, four people are injured. Hashmi, along with a group of people, runs towards the local CITU office, seeking shelter. One group of Sharma’s party chases them to the office, pushing and battering down its flimsy door. Concerned about their safety, Hashmi urges the others to escape by a rear window and over the back wall, helping some of the older men and four women to get across. He is unable to do so himself and runs in the opposite direction. He has lost his glasses and is unable to see well. A Janam colleague, Sudhanva Deshpande—we will encounter him again later in this book—hears shots being fired.

Hashmi is soon found in the middle of a nearby road, bleeding profusely from head wounds, having being beaten up with sticks. One Janam actor, a doctor, bundles his limp body and rushes him to the nearby Mohan Nagar hospital, where he is administered first aid, and then admitted to Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital, where doctors try to revive him. Lacking CAT-scan facilities, Hashmi is once again moved to the better-equipped Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, where the senior neurosurgeon
**Figure 1** Safdar in Performance, date indeterminate.

**Figure 2** Safdar Hashmi in a Rally, date indeterminate.

**Figure 3** Safdar Hashmi’s Funeral, New Delhi, January 2, 1989, Halla Bol, Bijendra, Mala, Sudhanva.

All images courtesy of Sahmat.
is on leave. Angry phone calls to his home, along with the presence of a growing crowd of people outside and inside the hospital bring him back to work. Hashmi is found to have three skull fractures, resulting in severe, multiple traumas to the brain.

At 10 p.m., Hashmi is declared dead. He was thirty-five.

January 5, 1989

Along with Safdar, Ram Bahadur, a worker and innocent bystander was also killed by Mukesh Sharma’s goons, mistaken for a CITU official; his story remains a subaltern footnote in the Sahmat story.

Inter-party political violence is a common-enough feature of Indian life. Political organization in India relies significantly on territorial control, physically wrested by formal and informal syndicates of local youth and mid-level leaders with varying degrees of adherence to the party line, retained by ideological conviction, opportunism or money. Partha Chatterjee has drawn attention to what he calls “political society”—the political topos of the neighborhood mandals, the corner and paan-shop addas—as providing something like the undercarriage to the more bourgeois stratum of “civil society.” Inasmuch as Chatterjee would casts this undercarriage somewhat in opposition to the State (as did theorists of “civil society”), in India this stratum must be seen to be constituted as much by their para-Statal functioning: mohalla-level mobilizations undertake not only the delivery of social goods as much as deliverance of kangaroo justice, the monitoring of social behavior, and the defense of territory, aspects which Chatterjee more than tends to gloss over, but also present signal overlaps with the party structure. Communist parties in India are as prone to these tactics as are their Congress or BJP contenders. (The Safdar incident, for instance, brought anonymous comment from the extreme, non-electoral, left—the CPI-ML or Naxalite—in the pages of the Economic and Political Weekly regarding the CPI-M’s own murder of a dissenting activist in Panihati, West Bengal on charge of “counter-revolution.” This plaint set into motion tit-for-tat recrimination between cultural activists representing the CPI-M and the CPI-ML, with the latter accusing the former of apathy towards the government’s ongoing persecution of the Naxal poets Gadar and Vara Vara Rao even as they drummed up sympathy for Safdar’s murder.)

By that yardstick, the extraordinary outpouring of public outrage, across party lines, after Safdar’s murder must be seen as unprecedented. More prominent international figures such as Salman Rushdie and M. F. Husain had been and have since been attacked and found themselves persona non grata with very little political consequence. Safdar was by contrast a significantly lesser-known, young party-ideologue and artist more or less at the beginnings of a career. The conflagration following January 1, 1989 leading up to the formation of Sahmat, must consequently be seen to be fanned by a broader political moment, a generalized schism within a institutional
and political environment, occasioning a unique convergence between civil society elements, the fraternity of artists, and political workers. Memories of the November strike were still fresh, and the networks active in its organization were still extant. So were keen recollections of Safdar’s crucial role in bringing together the gamut of the Delhi intelligentsia, the trade unions, and the CPI-M. In the broader realm, political and public anger against the Rajiv Gandhi regime from left and right wing alike was at its highest pitch, anger that would sweep the Congress from office in general elections a year later. For the intelligentsia, there was the long-festering sense of the disintegration of liberal institutions and constitutional freedoms since the Indira Gandhi period, as well as further instrumentalization of the government institutions of culture in the interests of ruling party ideology. A banner designed by Vivan Sundaram may be taken here as indicative: “Who killed Safdar Hashmi? Those who organize popular Utsavs (festivals).”  

Safdar’s brazen murder in broad daylight brought all that to a boil, eliciting responses from across the length and breadth of the country, the bulk of it from artists and intellectuals who had little or no occasion to know Safdar.

There was one other crucial element in this convergence. Little reported in the news, more than one participant and observer felt it important enough to bring it to my attention, each new confidence confirming the last one as it was repeated to me again and again. As it so happened, on January 1, the Delhi leaders of the CPI-M were ensconced far from Delhi in closed-door sessions of the party’s thirteenth Congress in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Had they been in Delhi, the spontaneous crossing of party and ideological lines that led to the formation of Sahmat—and the portrayal of Safdar first as an artist and only subsequently a communist partisan—would have been strongly curtailed, particularly in the factionalized context of Delhi where intra-party grudges are often worn on the sleeve. The lowered lines of defense allowing “civil society” elements to commingle with communist party cadres without strong politburo supervision were also, implicitly—we remember that this is 1989—the internal flowering of a perestroika moment.

*   *   *

By mid-morning of January 2, incensed phalanxes of CITU activists and CPI-M cadres as well as a large number of intellectuals and artists converged on the VP House party office where Safdar’s body had been brought. Late in the afternoon, the crowd, now numbering ten thousand, filtered out into a procession with Hashmi’s bier, draped with the hammer and sickle, lying in state on a flatbed truck. Marching in file, the procession wound its way to Mandi House—the headquarters of India’s state television network—onto Connaught Place and then to the electric crematorium, bringing traffic to a standstill. The electrifying and emotion-charged slogans that rent the air and the disciplined marching of communist cadres lent the procession the appearance of a state funeral.
Two days later, January 4th, Janam went back to Jhandapur, this time led by Safdar’s widow and theatre-comrade Molyooshee (Mala), and gave an emotion-laden, uninterrupted performance of *Halla Bol*, watched by thousands of workers and activists from Ghaziabad and Delhi. The audience had first congregated at Rabindra Bhavan—the epicenter of state cultural patronage—and were driven to the venue in buses. After the play, a silent procession filed past the CITU office where Safdar had been killed. On January 5th, the CPI-M took out a silent march, this time led by their Red Guards, with thousand of placards bearing Safdar’s photo and the phrase, “Shaheed Safdar Hashmi,” red flags dipped in salute, once again bringing downtown Delhi to a standstill and ending up at the home of Buta Singh, the Congress Home Minister. Editorials across the land condemned the murder and Congress’s involvement in the killing, even as Congress functionaries disowned Safdar’s killers from any association with the party.

By the end of the week, voices from across the country had become vociferous enough for the group coordinating events to contemplate implementing and coordinating a national protest action. January 9 was designated a national protest day. Rallies and tribute meetings were held in scores of cities, as local artists, intellectuals and political activists across the spectrum came together to express dissent. Lawyers in Orissa’s High Court abstained from work. Cinema halls in Calcutta remained closed, and all cultural events in Bengal—plays, performances, etc.—were suspended. Students in Delhi’s elite Jawaharlal Nehru University boycotted classes. Marches, meetings and performances of *Halla Bol* were held at prominent public locations in Jaipur, Calcutta, Ambala, Bombay, Pune, Chandigarh, Lucknow, and Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh. In Delhi, once again, another spectacular torchlit, silent procession, this time comprising the city’s intelligentsia—its artists, theater and film persons, journalists, schoolteachers—was taken out from the Supreme Court—where Mala and Janam once again performed *Halla Bol*—to Rabindra Bhavan. Speaking at the meeting, Ebrahim Alkazi, founder of the National School of Drama (NSD), demanded that College Road at Mandi House—the Indian State’s cultural hub comprising the NSD, Rabindra Bhavan and the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts—be renamed Safdar Hashmi Marg.

That matters had reached a national flashpoint is evinced by the further turn of events on January 12 at the Twelfth International Film Festival of India. Attended by several international film-makers and dignitaries, this was an event to which the government attached great prestige, an occasion meriting the rare live evening coverage on India’s tightly controlled Doordarshan network, usually disposed towards canned (i.e. censored) fare. Stepping up to the dais to hand out one of the awards, the protean Indian actress Shabana Azmi interrupted the proceedings, reading out a prepared statement explicitly naming and shaming the Congress at an international event hosted by it. As the rear of the auditorium erupted with slogans in a well-rehearsed move, Azmi registered their “protest against a system that on the one hand
Figure 4 Safdar Hashmi’s Funeral Procession, New Delhi, January 2, 1989.
claims to promote creativity and on the other, connives in the murder of cultural activists.” At the subsequent press conference, John Schlesinger, invited guest of the Festival for his 1988 Azmi-Shirley MacLaine film Madame Sousatzka chimed in, “I would unhesitatingly lend my voice to a protest against a murder like this of a theater person.” Congress’s ignominy was complete on state-controlled national television.11

* * *

Events so far had a spontaneous air. Theory of emergence: processes where “the results were neither predictable nor controllable… a multiplicity of seemingly random transactions gradually coalesce into a[n apparently] self-organized pattern, generating results that could not have been planned at the outset.”12

At the same time, it is plausible, in retrospect, to comprehend this spontaneity as in fact the activation of the tacit structural lines of alliance within the old—now increasingly perceived as threatened—liberalism: defined by convergences of interest between artists and teachers, between trade unions and electoral parties, between civil society and “enlightened” state functionary. To that extent, the events following Safdar’s death and leading up to Sahmat’s formation represent greater and greater formalization of one subset of these lines of communication, impelled by a rising tide of political dissatisfaction with Congress. Communist cadres, for one, had sensed the change in the wind that was to eventually lead to the Congress’ defeat a year later, bringing them close to power at the Centre in coalition with the Hindu right, the latter witnessing a growth in its parliamentary representation from two seats in the eight Lok Sabha (1984-1989) to eighty-five in the ninth (1989-1991). To that extent, Sahmat was formed by the same historical set of forces as its future antagonists.

On the part of the artists, there had been the marked degeneration of state patronage of art and its cultural institutions. (Indeed, the 1988-90 Haksar Committee Report on cultural institutions commissioned by the Human Resources and Development ministry under Rajiv Gandhi would acknowledge as much, but this “admission” was patently in the interest of budgetary divestment. The report made no suggestion of loosening administrative controls over cultural policy, so far monopolized by an exclusive prime ministerial coterie.13) For the media, there was the matter of the “increasingly centralized and arbitrary use of the public domain”14 since the Indira Gandhi days and the exacerbated erosion of authority and confidence within public institutions and the bureaucracy, brought to a head by the revelations about the Bofors arms deal kickbacks to Congress.

Sahmat’s formation thus can be seen as catching a mood.
Figure 5 Molyoshree (Mala) and Janam performing Halla Bol, Jhandapur, January 4, 1989.

Figure 6 Protest March, New Delhi, April 12, 1989, March from Mandi House to Buta Singh’s (then Home Minister) House.

Figure 7 Protest March, New Delhi, January 5, 1989.
The intensity of disparate communiqués triggered by Safdar’s murder found a core group coalescing at the point of its convergence, at VP House, defined less by vocation than by a certain aesthetic and political bent. Sahmat’s founding “Deed of Trust,” signed February 9, 1989, explicitly formalizes this mood into an agenda, setting down an authorial stake, a corporate ownership, in the angry effusion around the name “Safdar” that had driven events of the month preceding. The immediate occasion for this organizational delimitation was Safdar’s impending thirty-fifth birthday, April 12th. In a letter published in *Economic Political Weekly*, Sohail and Mala Hashmi, two of Sahmat’s founding trustees, apprised its readers that April 12 would henceforth be named National Street Theater Day, calling for daylong theater performances in Delhi and elsewhere, and announcing a *Jan Utsav* (“People’s Festival”) to be held from April 12-16. Plans were announced for seminars, for publishing Safdar’s articles on theater as well as his poems and songs, and for compiling a memoir of all the media coverage and response following his murder, in addition to a video on his life and work.15 A series of events were announced to raise funds for the incipient Sahmat: ticketed events such as a dance concert, a music concert, poetry readings (*Kavi Sammelan-Mushaira*), and an auction of donated artists’s work. Academic seminars, performance and visual arts, the dissemination of print, audio and video media, and a strong archival impulse—Sahmat would veer very little in future from these basic formats, with one exception. Sahmat would never ticket a single event in its entire history: the trait of an aneconomic sensibility which would push it, as we shall see, towards economic options that would bring it no end of conflict.

Despite its two CPM card-carrying signatories, Sahmat’s first *EPW* letter indicates a palpable erasure of Safdar’s identity as a communist partisan—a heavily tilted one at that, abundantly evinced in his writing on theater and art16—towards an almost exclusive emphasis on his status as an artist. The letter ends with a note whose tone may be considered critical for its future career. Seeking to foreground the arts as a political field, and redescibing Safdar’s communist affiliations in markedly aesthetic terms, the phrasing of the letter gropes its way towards a historical and theoretical terminology that appears to elude it, in its description of artists’s need to embrace political activism based upon an idea of “fellowship,” a kind of “loose guild” to express “self-reliance,” away, ostensibly, from the dominion of state or party:

*Safdar’s murder has made us conscious of the necessity of being self-reliant; the necessity to establish a kind of loose ‘guild’ based on fellowship that resists, and that acts when the moment comes, on behalf of artists. Safdar’s sacrifice is a sign telling us that some time or another all of us may have to function as artists-activists to ensure that abuse, violence, murder are not taken for granted in our society.*

The response to the letter was prodigious. Events centered around the question of
art and cultural practice were hosted across the length and breadth of the country, rallies, readings, performances, seminars, “goshties” running into days after April 12. No less than a phenomenal thirty thousand plays were performed in these days, in towns, cities and villages from Assam and Manipur to Punjab, from Gujarat to Kerala and Himachal Pradesh: an artistic outpouring aimed to strike at the heart of the political establishment.

* * *

Sahmat’s announcement in EPW occupies half of page 382 of its February 25, 1989 issue; the other half is taken up by another self-appointed corporate entity of “Concerned Citizens,” identifying themselves as “all non-Muslims,” seeking to bring the attention of the Rajiv Gandhi administration to the fast deteriorating situation over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. “Our government, much to its shame, sits idly while the situation worsens.”17 The letter implores the government to pay heed to proposals by the Muslim leaders to expedite the appointment of a special high court bench to resolve the status of the mosque: either “that the mosque itself should be cleared of idols and declared a national monument” or alternatively a wall be built separating the mosque from the Ram Chabutra, and that a temple to Rama built on the other side. The signatories of the letter comprise, like Sahmat’s membership, a mix of personas from the academic, literary and political worlds: Rajni Kothari, Balraj Puri, Khushwant Singh and so on. Two national-level politicians also signed the letter, both arrested during the time of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency: Ram Vilas Paswan, a Dalit leader who would become a key player in the Janata Dal government of 1989-1991, and George Fernandes, the veteran trade union leader responsible for India’s largest industrial action ever—the railway strike of 1974—and whose brother had been tortured by the Indira’s Emergency government to yield up his whereabouts. (He was in hiding in a house not more than a hundred meters from this author’s home, then all of eight years old.) In the Janata government of 1977-1980, Fernandes had been an outspoken critic of the right wing Bharatiya Jan Sangh (the Bharatiya Janata Party’s forerunner) and its leaders Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani for their links to the Hindu ultra-nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS and the BJP were the driving force behind radicalized Hindu sentiments over the Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid dispute.

It was a sign of the times to come: both these “Lohiaite” leaders would join the BJP-led coalition government in 1999. In time, Fernandes would become its key fixer.

2 1900, average annual rate of Rs. 17,505 to the US dollar.

3 1970, average annual rate of Rs. 7,862 to the US dollar.

4 The expression – literally “Jammed Wheels” – refers to a particular strike form where vehicular movement in a region is arrested by strikers, thus freezing all economic activity.


6 In her book on Safdar, Hashmi’s mother Qamar Azad Hashmi still refers to these hospitals by their colonial/colloquial names: Irwin hospital, Willingdon hospital.


8 The communist factions in India are divided along several different electoral and non-electoral—in some cases armed—organizations. The original Communist Party of India (CPI), was formed in 1920 in Tashkent, after the Second Comintern. The CPI-Marxist split from the CPI in 1964 over a series of ideological conflicts relating to the communist’s relationship to the then-dominant Indian National Congress, sharpened by the Indo-China war of 1962. The CPI-ML (Communist Party of India-Marxist Lefist) was formed in 1990, advocating armed resistance and subsequently splintered into a pro-Lin Biao and an anti-Lin Biao group. In 2004, the armed factions of the CPI-ML and its subsequent bantlings—People’s War Group and the Maoist Communist Center—have reconvened as a united front under the name of CPI-Maoist.


11 The news reports for all the above events are compiled in Safdar (New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 1989).


13 Haksar Committee, Report of the high-powered Committee appointed to review the performance of the National Academies and the National School of Drama, Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resources Development (New Delhi: Government of India, 1990).


15 Sohail Hashmi and Moloyshree Hashmi, “Commemorating Safdar Hashmi,” EPW 24, no. 8 (Feb. 25, 1989), 382.

16 That Safdar viewed aesthetic form strongly through the lens of political affiliation is evident in his last interview, given to Eugène van Herven, where he reviews the competing oeuvres of his peers in street and political theater, including Habib Tanvir, Irfan Habib, and Badal Sircar. As the CPI’s P. Govinda Pillai put it in 2003, “Safdar did not shy away from the fact that he was partisan both in politics and arts.” Written for his American audience, Von Herven’s subsequent account of this encounter, called to account by Kavita Nagpal for its atrocious transliteration of Indian names (Gandhi is repeatedly written as Ghandi, Faiz Ahmed Faiz is written Fez, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale became Bindranwale Singh) significantly covers over Safdar’s complete immersion in the CPI’s activity, portraying him more as a kind of left-oriented radical artist. This implicit tension would be revealed to much greater schism later in Sahmat’s history, as we shall see. See “The People Gave Us So Much Energy,” Safdar interview with Eugène van Herven, in Sudhanta Deshpande, Theatre of the Streets: The Jan Nataya Manch Experience (New Delhi: Janam, 2007); P. Govinda Pillai, “Politics of Performance in Contemporary India,” Safdar Hashmi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Lectures (New Delhi: Digangan, 2001); Eugène van Herven, “Plays, Applause and Bullets: Safdar Hashmi’s Street Theatre,” The Drama Review 33, no. 4 (Winter 1989); Kavita Nagpal, “Another Angle on ‘Plays, Applause, and Bullets,’” The Drama Review 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1991), 11-12.

THE PHYSICALITY OF CITIZENSHIP: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND INSURGENT URBANISM
DIANE E. DAVIS
PRASSANNA RAMAN

People use violence to make claims upon the city and use the city to make violent claims.
James Holston and Arjun Appadurai

Both the global Occupy movement and the large number of protests sweeping through Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other parts of North Africa and the Middle East have captured the world’s imagination, not just because of their seemingly momentous political import, but also because they literally show the enactment of democratic sentiments in the form of bustling bodies physically clamoring for rights and recognition in the face of power. Without cameras, such insurgent urbanism would neither be accessible to the world at large, nor understood as violently disrupting the status quo. These images render legible the intensity of people’s emotions whether they’re camping at the seats of political and economic power, or marching towards a phalanx of armed police. But it is not merely the pictures that inspire. It is also the physical concentration of bodies in open and highly symbolic spatial locations that sparks an interest in the geographies of rebellion. Recent events suggest that the public square has become the proverbial “center stage” upon which collective action is both possible and symbolically meaningful. Like Tiananmen Square, the mere mention of Tahrir Square, Pearl Roundabout, Green Square, and Zuccotti Park evokes images of people whose power to confront an autocratic system needs only the proper physical venue. Such possibilities suggest that when people enact and voice their rights as citizens in public spaces, they indeed have the collective capacity to speak truth to power. In the most literal sense, this also means that citizenship is physical as much as political. It is the physicality of citizenship as a form of insurgent urbanism—as well as its origins, limits, and possibilities—that concerns us here. How is democratic citizenship enacted in the city and is it solely concentrated in formally planned public squares? Our essay lays out a set of questions and examples to explore the relationship between revolutions and urban space.
Precisely because physical space matters in insurgent collective action, regimes have long sought heavy-handed and subtle measures to control or limit citizen congregation, particularly in cities. Even in the United States, most major cities require a public permit to hold a demonstration, and recent laws have further curtailed the right to protest. In non-democratic urban settings, a much larger array of tactics is used to curtail public gatherings, ranging from military containment of public sites to proactive monitoring and the strategic interception of communications used to plan mobilization. Such tactics are not new: the grand design of Paris boulevards by the renowned Baron Haussmann, for example, was crafted with an eye to thwarting mass urban rebellions associated with the 1848 uprising. In the contemporary world, we see the state’s continued efforts to control mobility and seal off open spaces as a central response to the challenges imposed by collective action.

Yet it is important to remember that the idea of public space, and its starring role in social protest or democratic struggle, is grounded in much more than the physical. Even as a preferred site of mobilization, spaces become “public” not just because they are materially constructed as such, but because they are willfully appropriated by citizens for public purposes. Tahrir Square in Cairo, Pearl Roundabout in Manama, and Zuccotti Park in New York City have been elevated to the status of iconic public spaces not because they were built by prescient urban planners to accommodate political revolutions, but because they have become highly accessible focal points whose character and function is part of a city’s urban and political history, in turn interpreted and re-written by its own citizens. The iconic public squares that characterize central areas of most major metropolises around the world have been protected and celebrated because they represent the larger society’s most critical economic, political, and cultural conquests.

It is no surprise then that because monumental public squares serve as symbolic sites for the principal institutions of power, whether political, religious, or cultural, they draw the critical or dissatisfied masses, whose very presence makes a statement that a country’s institutions should include the very people whose bodies inhabit that space. Any link between the right to protest for a better life, on the one hand, and the occupation of those institutional and physical spaces associated with governing power on the other, will recall French urban philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s “right to the city” oratory as a plea for more general social inclusion. Who does the city belong to in terms of space and socioeconomic benefits, and how might a physical “retaking” of certain spatial sites become the first step in challenging the larger social and political order? The distances between the actual, intended, and ideal rights to the city are often mediated by protest, and even by violence as enacted in public performances on public squares. Still, we might argue the more autocratic the regime and the more violent the protest, the less an identifiable public square or clearly defined public space is actually needed. Moreover, if there is no agreement on the symbolic and actual act of sharing public space, the unrest is more likely to
spill beyond the familiar or easily managed spatial bounds of the public square. As such, the uses of space in social protests unfold dialectically: the occupation of public squares and parks as a means of social protest will both reflect citizen dissatisfac-
tion and serve as the catalyst for social and political negotiations between citizens and the state, with the hope that the latter will ultimately accommodate or respond to physically expressed dissatisfaction.

When public squares are not routinely occupied, however, we also know something about citizenship. Either there is no claim-making and the status quo is not under fundamental challenge, whether literally or figuratively; or, conversely the depth, critique, and extent of citizen dissatisfaction with existing power structures is so great that claim-making and negotiation are bypassed and efforts are directed towards more rebellious and unconstrained insurgent action. In such settings citizens will turn not to the public squares but to the streets or the underground. And in this sense, while citizenship and insurgency both have a physicality, they suggest a different spatiality: the former is more likely to be enacted in public squares and other physically bounded spaces that are recognized by states as appropriate sites for claim-making, while the latter unfolds in interstitial, marginal, dispersed, and less easily controllable spaces where the state’s power and authority is less easily wielded.

The Occupy protests in the United States are primarily focused on dismantling a fundamentally unequal political and economic system, and as such are examples of relatively non-violent protests of relatively conventional citizenship given life through the occupation of parks and other public spaces near financial districts. The desired permanence of these protests through the erection of fixed encampments (and in some places, the establishment of insurgent infrastructure like toilets and wooden shelters) is intended not just as a visual and conceptual juxtaposition to the Wall Street-type buildings that often surround these locations, but also aims to celebrate and institutionalize the use of public squares as spaces of citizen dissent. But in light of the ways that the United States legal system both enables and constrains the physicality of citizenship in public spaces, in most cities Occupy strategists have been prevented from making these public sites their own autonomous urban villages, with protesters and their tents forcibly removed when the courts and the police ruled against their right to remain. Some of this owed to the pure physicality of these citizenship claims—the fact that many of the Occupy protesters both derived and found their political agenda within the physical act of occupying public space. Unlike Tahrir Square, where the deliberation between the organizers of the movement occurred as much in private residences and online as in the plaza itself, and where the motivation for protest built on a sustained critique that permeated all aspects of life, not just the right to gather publically, many of the Occupy protestors saw the taking of public space as the primary object and focal point of political deliberation and opposition. That is, the preoccupation with the physical site of the protest was so great that it at times served to sideline some of the larger injustices that inspired
indignation in the first place, with the more fundamental political goals of societal transformation falling to the wayside in the struggle to remain physically ensconced in the formally-designated Occupy spaces.

Moreover, different cities hosted very different types of protests, depending on the nature of the spaces under occupation. While the original Occupy Wall Street (Figure 1) targeted a privately owned public space named Zuccotti Park, the Occupy Boston movement congregated in a city-built public park called Dewey Square. These two sets of protests also convened two different groups of people whose relationships to the physical space suggested very different forms of politics and citizenship. Occupy Wall Street hosted a permanent encampment but gained its greatest visibility by drawing weekend protesters who lent their voices to the actual protests but did not remain committed to protecting or colonizing the Occupy spaces on a daily schedule. Occupy Boston built its visibility around a permanent core group that spent all its time at the Dewey Square site, strategizing and planning protests while also engaging in a committed media campaign to legitimize their physical presence and build support in a larger circle of citizens. Sometimes the aims of the permanent occupiers clashed with the weekend protestors. And in both cases, the divergent relationships to physical space established by the protesters reflected the limits and possibilities of the movements’s capacities to both keep visible and engage a larger audience of supporters nation-wide. By building a movement that focused on actual public space, the Occupy protesters did indeed evolve a new form of articulating citizenship by strategically deploying public spaces in the construction of a larger movement for democratic citizenship. But the ambiguous role that the commitment to physically occupying space played within the different urban factions of the larger struggle, and the failure of these simultaneously-enacted, city-based protests to link larger citizenship concerns to social or legal rights to permanently occupy physical spaces, also limited the power of the movement both locally and nationally, further reflecting divisions within the movement about its larger political purpose.

The Occupy movement and the limits of its spatial strategies can be contrasted against those deployed in the Egyptian case, where Tahrir Square became the single strategic and symbolic site for a variety of claims from various competing groups, all sharing a desire for large-scale political change but not agreeing on its component elements. Whether from anti-Mubarak, anti-military, pro-Islamic, or pro-democratic forces, all Egyptians appear to have agreed that Tahrir Square should symbolize the necessity of a fundamental socio-political transformation in forms of governance in Egypt, thus explaining why a small group of protesters grew into a mass mobilization, energizing thousands in a short amount of time and keeping them committed for days on end. In this sense, it stands almost as the obverse of the Occupy movement, where there may have been unity of purpose among those initially visiting or camping at the site, but greater disunity as questions emerged about whether and how the symbolic appropriation of the site should be linked to a larger movement.
for change. Part of the difference here rests in the divergent political contexts. In Egypt the “physicality of citizenship,” as enacted through protests in an iconic public space associated with government power, can be understood as a call for recognition of the rights of citizenship in an urban and national context where such forms of claim-making have been controlled, monitored, or repressed by the state for decades. In such an environment, any actions on the part of people to lay claim to public space will be seen as a direct challenge to the power and legitimacy of the government. In the Occupy movement in the United States, the use of public space for protest has become a relatively routine form of enacting citizenship, and it usually unfolds in a political and spatial environment where such actions are legally tolerated (if not in fact implicitly invited, as in Zuccotti Park, which was purposely designated as a privately-owned public space in order to reap zoning concessions to real estate developers).8

All this means that while showing the physicality of citizenship, the Occupy protests in the United States were far from radical or system-altering (as in Egypt), and their appearance served as just another form of pluralist politics. Public spaces in United States cities may offer a physical venue for voices not readily heard within the halls of legislative power, but as a platform for dissent they often fail to fundamentally challenge the status quo, serving instead as a format for giving voice to those who seek to join, reform, in or redirect—rather than overturn—the existing political structure. This surely is citizenship, but citizenship in a democracy is relatively stabilizing, whereas citizenship marshalled in the call for revolutionary transformation is a more de-stabilizing form of political insurgency. In the latter conditions, public squares and concrete spaces for physical protest are essential precisely because the ballot boxes as sites of change are likely to be closed off.

**Roads and Roundabouts: From Spaces of Citizenship to Infrastructures of Insurgency**

The distinction between citizenship and insurgency is relevant not just for political theorists, but also for those who seek to understand geographies of protest and to assess whether there are established spatialities associated with particular forms of collective action and opposition politics. One way to pursue this line of thought is to consider the socio-spatial dynamics of different aspects of the urban built environment, and to contrast the forms, meaning, and strategies of protest that are deployed in public squares with those that unfold in other types of urban spaces. How do the physical attributes of built environmental space mold citizen action? How can spatial forms or modes of territorial connection be seen as a relatively autonomous element in the construction and study of urban protest or its origins, nature, and impact? How and why are public spheres in a city commandeered by one group to establish hegemony?9
Protest in a public square conjures up images of democracy at work—concerned and proactive citizens gathering together peacefully to voice their opinions to a benevolent government. Famous revolutions staged in public squares, like the February Revolution and the May Day demonstrations, have helped elevate such spaces to the higher realm of mythology even as they have inspired everyday citizens to try to accomplish similarly democratic feats. But this may be because public squares and central plazas are usually cavernous sites that concentrate large numbers of people in a single location, providing collective interaction that in its form will reflect a mass—rather than class or hierarchically stratified—society. As noted, there is often a state logic involved in the construction of public squares, or a market logic involved in the creation of central plazas, with both such spaces being easily monitored by the state. To be sure, public squares can be the sites of potential insurgency, especially when the collection and display of mass protest becomes so unwieldy that even armed police cannot control the tumultuous crowds. In such instances, governing officials often seek other forms of spatial control or physical intervention to minimize the collective power emanating from these places. Among these techniques, the erection of walls and barricades are among the most common. In Egypt, in fact, the recent resurgence of riots and protests centered in Tahrir Square pushed authorities to erect walls and place heavy concrete blocks around key government buildings. In order to undermine the protesters, police strategically positioned several “24-foot tall concrete barriers bisecting streets leading from the symbolic center of the protests, Tahrir Square, to their most despised target, the Interior Ministry.” Such actions not only show both the possibilities and limits of enacting citizenship through protest in a single public square, they also remind us that public squares are not the only actionable spaces in cities, nor are they the only sites of protest.

Indeed, the types of protests that emerge in streets and in lateral spaces leading to and from public squares may have an entirely different ethos and political logic than those focused on public squares. Frequently, central plazas become visible in the first place not just because of their closeness to the symbols of power, but also because they stand at the intersection of a city’s main transport routes. Many so-called public squares are merely traffic intersections masquerading as public spaces. Although they sometimes serve the same function, traffic intersections are not as easily walled or controlled without impeding the flows of citizens and goods that provide the economic and social lifeblood of a city. Thus they not only may invite more insurgent politics, they may also enable more disruptive and effective revolutionary action. After all, there is much to be risked when authorities put key transport nodes on lockdown, or when the city’s transport grid comes to a standstill in the effort to squelch political protest. The intersection of roads and different modes of transportation may trace their history to engineering logics, but whatever their original design they enable the coming together of different classes of people from all parts of the city, and often to a single site to protest a united cause. More prosaically, large traffic intersections and roundabouts (which would include Tahrir Square and Pearl...
Figure 1  Occupy Wall Street, New York City, USA, October 5, 2011.

Figure 2  Cairo, Egypt, February 11, 2011, showing protesters marching from Abbassia neighborhood to Tahrir Square.

Figure 3  Pearl Roundabout, Manama, Bahrain, February 19, 2011.
Roundabout, Figures 2 and 3) allow different groups of people to gather efficiently. The 2010 Red Shirts protests in Bangkok also emphasize the importance of streets and intersections. Controlling major intersections also meant shutting down access to large swathes of commercial activities, aggressive acts which intensified the pressure on the government. Bangkok’s famously crowded streets were empty during the clashes as a visible reminder of the Red Shirts’ ability to majorly disrupt economic, political, and social life if their demand for change was not met. There were no Public Squares or ordered civic spaces the Red Shirts occupied. The streets functioned as the tools, symbol, and platform of protests. Because roads transform into sites of greater historical weight when they are used as glorified soapboxes to air public grievances, they remind us that both function and form define a public square.

So why is there so little emphasis on the analysis of major confluences in transportation networks and their impacts on protests or the physicality of citizenship, and so much attention focused on the romanticized notion of public squares? Is it merely sexier to see civic centers and public squares as emblematic democratic spaces? To a degree, yes, although it also much simpler to frame the world in terms of “democratic” and “undemocratic” spaces than to articulate what such spaces actually look like or to explain what about their physical form and urban social function makes them democratic. Likewise, it is easier for observers in the democratic West to identify with common spatial and political symbols like public squares, as they try to make sense of the mysterious or “exotic” foreign locales that are now awash in protest, than to link mass mobilization in physical space to the complicated social, political, and economic dynamics that run beneath the surfaces of rebellion. But doing so can misrepresent the nature and significance of a protest. For example, the Sidi Bouzid protests in Tunisia sparked the greater North African and Middle Eastern revolution not just because they catalyzed anti-government sentiment but because the outrage was inspired by the political repression of an informal street vendor—a type of activity that relies on free movement in public space and is ubiquitous in the plazas and streets in cities in this and other regions of the world. Even so, the everyday repression on the street that helped spark the Tunisian uprising was almost immediately overshadowed in the Western media by a focus on the monumentality of mobilizations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, Green Square, and Zuccotti Park. Has this happened because outside observers equate a successful revolt with a concentration of violence in yet another iconic public square?

Such assumptions belie a causality that must be subject to interrogation: do public squares make revolutions or do revolutions make public squares? There may be no clear answer to this question, but it should force more thoughtful discussion of why so many observers are pre-occupied with activities that unfold in public squares. It should also inspire expanded deliberation over what form the physicality of citizenship takes in a given social and spatial environment, as well as a more nuanced assessment of the role of variegated urban spaces in the social construction of
a continuum of political actions, ranging from expressing citizenship to enacting protest to undertaking insurgency to fomenting revolution. It may be that, in contrast to public squares, urban infrastructure like roads and bridges provide a network for sustained social and spatial interaction, and these sites may be just as central to protest outcomes because they are less likely to be controlled by the authorities even as they offer an infrastructure for an engaged yet mobile insurgency. Conversely, when the unencumbered free flow of people is blocked and when collective mobility in space—within and between public squares, roads, bridges, and other types of infrastructure—is completely blocked off, then it is likely that one is witnessing a full-blown insurgency, if not a revolution.

The street was a key unit of analysis in the revolution in Libya. Anti-government protesters were flooding urban roadways, alongside the police and the military, trying to take back Libya one street at a time, one city at a time. In spite of Qaddafi’s brutal use of air strikes and imported mercenaries, in the initial months of the struggle, protesters transformed the geography of Libya into a giant public square. Oddly enough, Green Square in Tripoli, a city almost entirely controlled by Qaddafi until his death, remained peaceful because tanks blocked the roads into the city and the army pro-actively shot any protester attempting to move towards the square. Turning Green Square into Tahrir Square was the dream of Libyan protesters, but such objectives were continually thwarted by the authorities, who had programmed counter-uses of the space to undermine such a possibility. During much of the conflict, Green Square remained in the hands of Qaddafi, who used it to celebrate Jamahiriya Day with elaborate parades that manifested his iron grip on the city’s streets and open spaces. The unfortunate Libyan example demonstrates the futility of public squares as driving forces of political change without a public free enough to articulate and physically access such spaces for their own democratic purposes. And precisely for this reason, the streets of Libyan towns like Benghazi and Brega became the real sites of dissent, because they were not as easily colonized by the authorities. Even in the case of Tahrir Square, citizen access to the square through existent roads and intersections was as central to protest outcomes as were the wide-open spaces downtown that received the peripatetic masses.

Although increased mobility in space can enable acts of protest, just as public spaces can serve as symbolic sites for enacting citizenship, the question of whether these and other built environmental factors will motivate—rather than just mediate—political dissatisfaction remains open to further reflection. To what extent does the built environment, itself, structure the nature of protest or citizenship claims? Preliminary studies of social movements have shown that groups of citizens who feel most institutionally, culturally, politically, and geographically distant from governing institutions and/or the ruling classes tend to be a main source of rebellion, while those with social, spatial, and political proximity to sources of power and authority may be less likely to mobilize, rebel, or revolt. Such findings help explain why the occupation of
public spaces near centers of political and financial power can both symbolize and bridge the distance between citizens and the government. This in essence is what protest is all about: reducing the gap between ruler and ruled, have and have not, rich and poor. Sometimes the simultaneous enactment of citizenship in both center and peripheral urban spaces is all that is needed to call attention to these gaps at the level of the city, and to set the engines of change in motion.

Can Urban Design Create Democracy?

In this climate where venues for the enactment of physical—and virtual—citizenship are shifting or in flux, we must return to the question of whether and how urban design can enable democracy and/or citizenship, insurgent or otherwise. To be sure, a prior question might be whether planners and urban designers should be involved in the construction of protest landscapes in the first place. The history of Tahrir Square shows that it was precisely the failure of urban planning that led to the unintended construction of the public square, which eventually became the physical launching pad and international face of Arab Spring. As such, the protesting citizens who articulated Cairo’s central city plaza as a site for insurgency, thus elevating it to the iconic status of a Public Square, are the real protagonists in the struggle for change. Thus we should think of the irate citizen as inadvertent yet insurgent designer. Likewise, the Occupy Movements in the United States can be considered a challenge to the safely conventional programming of open sites around financial districts, with protesters turning publicly-accessible parks into insurgent spaces by voicing their claims.

In all of these examples, protest spaces were not formally designed as venues for making public claims so much as articulated and created as such by citizens. Such insurgent actions are perhaps the most valuable tool for making effective claims on the city and for actively using the city to make claims on the state. If Tahrir Square had been intentionally constructed as an official protest landscape by the state and/or urban planners, a Hyde Park of sorts, would Egypt’s democratic revolution have been as successful? Possibly. But it may be that the sheer act of challenging the gap between the “design from above” and “citizen claims from below” that is the most effective strategy for fomenting revolt, a sort of “insurgent design” that builds on the formal properties of place but creates something new in the process. Whether cast from above or below, urban design is political, as are the planning decisions that give life to design projects, particularly when they empower citizens to express their grievances and make public their sentiments. The design of space must be considered a central protagonist in the struggle to create a new social order.

But urban design is only one element in the construction of a democratically inclusive public sphere. The notion that through proactive urban design one can induce or govern the spatiality of political gatherings and protest is flawed, be-
cause when the will to gather and protest is strong enough, anywhere will do, as the cases of Bangkok and Istanbul have shown. The pictures of Tahrir Square and Pearl Roundabout filled with protesters are impressive because they convey a sense of limitlessness to people power. And in this regard, the street is as good or even better than pre-planned public squares, while public squares will remain empty and the streets silent if the public itself is not on the move. Moreover, public squares are usually static spaces, and as such are unlikely to capture the dynamism of large-scale protests or organized social movements that find themselves capable of entering all spheres of public life, not merely public squares. It is for this reason that transportation networks and hubs become essential to designing protests as cities haphazardly expand, particularly in settings where the state has learned to crack down or control open public squares, as with Tiananmen Square. When physical space for protest becomes a rare commodity, a city’s democratic and civic spheres are also under threat. Yet when the desire for rebellion is strong enough, public squares are not required—a street is sufficient to effect change.

We conclude with a set of queries about the role of formal urban design in creating democracy, whether in terms of spatial integration, political inclusion, or other common manifestations of such ideals. If any urban artery and clearing can be used for demonstrations, are well-designed public squares actually necessary for democracy? If people wishing to exercise their physical and political citizenship become accidental insurgent designers, is the role of professional urban design redundant, at least in terms of its commitment to the creation of public spaces? And if so, what role should urban design and planning play in the creation of socially-just cities and in enabling urban citizenship? Perhaps the value of design professionals lies not in the explicit construction of protest landscapes, but in the response to and recording of physical claims to citizenship in the already built environment. For example, after the rebels took Tripoli, they renamed Green Square to Martyrs’ Square, as a symbol of respect to those who had lost their lives in the fight to reclaim Libya from Qaddafi and his forces. Among other things, urban designers can help preserve the spatial history and memory of the battle for Libya and other sites of insurgency by building monuments and iconic architecture that reflect the symbolism of the square and the importance of such sites in a country’s history. Perhaps urban designers can best serve the city and democratic ideals by being urban spatial scribes, using their professional skills and legitimacy to make public the citizen battles both won and lost in struggles over access and control of the city. The marriage of sensitive political awareness and meaningful urban design can go a long way in inspiring an ongoing struggle to create a more just and equitable society.
6 Tali Hatuka, Violent Acts and Urban Space in Contemporary Tel Avic: Revising Moments (Austin: University of Texas, 2010).
7 Taking a cue from the Spanish Acampadas.
10 It was inspired in part by a deadly riot after a soccer match that brought out nascent tensions within and among divergent political forces competing to guide the post-Mubarak political transition.
13 The use of technology in mounting protest demonstrations and inspiring dissent online have implications for urban designers and others interested in creating or strategically utilizing spaces in the city for citizens to publically voice their concerns. But whether such technologies will make the Hyde Parks of the world disappear, or whether parks, streets, sidewalks, and public squares will be replaced by the Internet, still remains to be seen. See Cody Doctorow, “The Internet is the Best Place for Dissent to Start,” The Guardian, 3 January 2012, accessed 16 February 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/blog/2012/jan/03/the-internet-best-dissent-start.
In his famous passages in *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant, the so-called father of modern liberalism, outlines the three maxims of how a society moves toward Enlightenment: one, think for oneself; two, think in the mindset of others; and three, think consistently.1 The longer one considers these propositions, the stranger they sound. For example, if we take maxim two seriously, we could become so busy connecting with others—and, of course, they with us—that there is little room for that special someone, who presumably would get most of our empathetic energy. Friends, lovers, spouses and even relatives have no particular place in Kant’s world. Hegel stated it perhaps all too bluntly; marriage for Kant “is degraded to a bargain for mutual use.”2

Now this might seem like a strange way to begin a conversation about Kant, but one must remember that Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a big deal about the family; its importance both historically in mankind’s development and symbolically in each of our lives. According to Rousseau, “The most ancient of all societies, and the only one that is natural, is the family.”3 This is not to say that Kant is against ‘the family.’ Only that unlike Rousseau, who consciously tries to match his philosophy with a real world principle, Kant does not. For him, it is not our family that is the source of our ‘naturalness,’ but rather an innate and placeless sense of “sociability.” In Paragraph 41 of the *Critique of Judgment*, just a few sentences after outlining his famous maxims, Kant points out that “sociability” is “requisite for man as a being destined for society, and so as a property (Eigenschaft) belonging to humanity.”4 Kant phases it as a “Trieb zur Gesellschaft,” in other words, as an innate drive or compulsion toward the social. But what is this compulsion? Perhaps one can answer it in the negative, for it is most certainly not the same as wanting to be “public.” Whereas Rousseau discussed the idea of ‘the public’ in his *Social Contract*, differentiating the public person for the private individual, Kant shuns this distinction and, indeed, tries his best to avoid that classic duality. Instead, he implies a distinction between public and sociability, with the philosophical weight clearly on the latter.

I start on this note in order to rethink the question of modernity and its theorizations of ‘the public,’ and to remind ourselves that this concept is hardly as stable as we might suppose. Kant is challenging us to link the social neither to the private (i.e. the family) nor to the public (i.e. a political or economic entity). In the Kantian world, we (and that means me and all the other billions of ‘I’s the world over) are both
motivated by our independence and individuality, and yet, at the same time, we are uniquely oriented to the social through the unstoppable energy of a Trieb. Imagine that you are not married, sitting on a beach talking to your friends on Facebook with your iPad. That would be a perfect Kantian situation. With that image in mind we can see that Kant’s “sociability” is fully modern, more modern than anyone could have imagined in the late eighteenth century.

Let’s look more closely at maxim two, where Kant asks us “to put ourselves in thought in the place of every one else” (An der Stelle jedes anderen denken). It is obvious that putting yourself in someone else’s shoes is not the same as engaging in a public discourse. It means instead that I am not just sitting down at a table and talking to the person, but, for a while at least, trying to ‘be’ that person, in my mind. Kant does not say how one goes about doing this, but clearly one can ask, what does that person eat? Is he grumpy in the morning? How does he have friends? It would be impossible to answer these questions without talking to that person, and I would be expected, I presume, to do this with both men and women.

Naturally, in the late-eighteenth century, Kant would have imagined a restrained interest in each other’s lives. But he did open the door and nowhere does he warn against ‘going too far.’ Today we might use the word empathy to describe such an engagement. I have indeed used that word in my discussion above, but it is not exactly correct. When we think of empathy, a late-nineteenth century concept, we associate it with emotional contact or with sympathy. It is a psychological attitude. Maxim two, however, is not about emotions. On the contrary! It is where Kant locates the empirical. The process is purely fact-finding. It does not involve judgment, which happens later.

Now Kant wants the person that I am having this exchange with to do the same with me. He also wants all of us to do this with everyone else over the extended period of our lives. That is his maxim three, the cumulative result of which produces what he calls “sensus communis”—the sense of the communality. This concept is sometimes discussed as if it were equivalent with ‘the public’ and sometimes discussed in relationship to the so-called ‘Public Sphere.’ In both cases this is a mistake. If the sensus communis is a public, it is only because we have produced it inside out and that means, for Kant, that it has no external, potentially alienated Will separate from our personal lives. In replacing the concept ‘the public,’ which does not appear at all in The Critique of Judgment, with sensus communis, Kant changes the terms of the discussion, thereby producing a whole new architecture of thought. If we want to coin a term it would be ‘Sphere of Sociability.’

In an accompanying footnote, Kant admits the process by which the sensus communis develops is easy to state theoretically, but is, in fact, “difficult and slow of accomplishment.” And as Kant writes in Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?
(1784), “Daher kann ein Publikum nur langsam zur Aufklärung gelangen.” A public can reach Enlightenment only very slowly. In the process, it changes from being merely “ein Publikum” to being the more important sensus communis.

The change does not require a vote. It does not necessarily need a democracy. There is remarkably little politics in the Kantian Enlightenment. Public spaces are not necessary nor even a parliament building. People do need, of course, the status of freedom and the space to meet and talk. These needs, however, could be served just as effectively on a public bus as in a private room. In this, Kant’s philosophy is strikingly different from the conventions of what we might think when it comes to liberalism. The revolution in Egypt could be considered a good example of Kantian politics in the way that it unified Facebook with events in the street, but it is not fully Kantian. Kant would want the Egyptians to connect with the Israelis, and vice versa, and this is most certainly not going to happen. The reason we have to do maxim two is precisely because we are different, so different that we have to strip away the natural over-determinism of our ontology to engage the ontology of the Other. It is rather astonishing that in Kant’s world, we may be neighbors, but we are yet completely unknown to each other—and to ourselves!—until we begin the laborious process of interaction.

The splitting of the Self into a Self and a not-Self, which is the requirement of maxim two where the not-Self takes precedent, is Kant’s most radical proposition, and the one that Hegel would later most vehemently disparage. For Hegel, this proposition breaks the Self into incompatible parts: philosophy, precisely because it is philosophy and not social sciences, must talk about the Self as a unit.

Among the philosophers against whom Kant was arguing was (of course) John Locke, who gave us the first modern, theorized distinction between public and private, or more specifically between public good and private possession. Locke—like Kant for that matter—was not interested in private thoughts, private feelings or anything that we might include in the general discussion of ‘personal privacy.’ His primary concern was the relationship between you and what you own. It was a thoroughly mercantile perspective. Owning a sack of coffee beans, for example, requires a distinctive set of legal protections, such as a contract, that guarantees the legitimacy of that private ownership and that allows the beans to be sold or marketed without corruption.

Kant gets rid of the issue of possessions in that standard sense. In fact, his entire perspective is mildly anti-capitalist if not outright anti-legalistic. What I ‘possess’ is not a thing, but my sociability. But as we have seen, Kant also gets rid of ‘the private,’ for a good Kantian would have to give up the boundary of privacy whenever a stranger walks up and wants to go fishing around in his or her ontology. To do this, everyone needs to be on their best behavior. In Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, Kant writes that the one thing in the world that is unambiguously good is the “good will.”
He opens the book with the following words: “Nothing in the world—or out of it!—can possibly be conceived that could be called ‘good’ without qualification except a Good Will.” In fact, so he continues, “power, riches, honor, even health, and happiness” are for naught “if there isn’t a good will to correct their influence on the mind.”

Kant, in a sense critiques the Enlightenment legalism that became the foundation of a certain stream of modern thinking. Though legalism remained an important strand of what it means to be modern, so too did the ‘missing’ nature of the public. The consequences were profound: once removed as a philosophical project, it was never really reinstated. Hegel, for example, puts the public back into play, but he limits it by equating it with the nation-state. The situation gets no better with Edmund Husserl. whose idea of the Life-World, for example, is diametrically opposed to the idea that there is a metaphysics of ‘public’ or even of ‘the nation’ that stands outside our individual existential spheres. In fact, Husserl is so anti-public that there is almost no glue holding society together. If you wanted to throw your grandmother under the bus, that might be perfectly fine from a Husserlian point of view if the deed was part of your Life-World and you consequently engaged it in the protocols of phenomenological self-research. Kant at least believed in the power of moral teaching and the principle of duty: concepts that provided the ‘glue’ in the face of the absent public. For Hegel, the ‘glue’ was the Spirit and its dialectical and historical resonances, but these enlightenment abstractions are completely absent in Husserl. If Kant’s world—supposing it had ever been really achieved—was strange, Husserl’s would have been a nightmare.

To simplify a bit, one can say Hegel took away maxim two and asked us to go from maxim one to maxim three, which in his philosophy focuses on the nation-state. Husserl then took away the nation-state as just another metaphysical falsity, leaving, in a sense, a variation of maxim one. And so the damage was done. As liberating as it is, Husserl’s world is a potentially dangerous place to be.

This raises the question, How did the ‘public’ survive this assault against it? The answer has a lot to do, ironically, with the rise of the nation-state in the nineteenth century and thus in a sense the victory of the Hegelian world view. It was in the interest of the emerging nation states, after all, to have ‘a public,’ if only because it needed to stabilize its increasingly bureaucratic and militarized hold on life. The rise of the bourgeoisie, of global colonialism, and of professional societies in the Victorian era, especially in the 1880s, played another critical part. The ‘public’ was put back into the philosophical system really only with Karl Marx, who demanded the abolition of property in the name of “public purposes.” In other words, for Marx, ‘the public’ was the new super structure that was bigger than the defunct bourgeois word. Therein lies at least one of the sources of the modern confusion about ‘the public’ as a type of enemy of individualism. But that is a different story and takes me out of philosophy and into history and politics. I want to remain focused on the post-Kantian,
Figure 1 Mark Jarzombek, The Kantian City.
philosophical resistance to ‘the public,’ for I am not convinced that the return of ‘the public’—often associated with a liberal rejection of self-interest—matches with the anti-public philosophy of liberal thinking.

Let me take as a small example the case of Richard Sennett who sees himself as a champion of the “public realm.” According to Sennett,

*The most important fact about the public realm is what happens in it. Gathering together strangers enables certain kinds of activities which cannot happen, or do not happen as well, in the intimate private realm. In public, people can access unfamiliar knowledge, expanding the horizons of their information. Markets depend on these expanding horizons of information. In public, people can discuss and debate with people who may not share the same assumptions or the same interests. Democratic government depends on such exchanges between strangers. The public realm offers people a chance to lighten the pressures for conformity, of fitting into a fixed role in the social order; anonymity and impersonality provide a milieu for more individual development. This promise of turning a fresh personal page among strangers has lured many migrants to cities.*

Strangers meeting, talking and sharing experiences in the real and metaphorical openness of public space, as Sennett describes it here, is very Kantian and is based on the core principles of Kant’s liberalism. But Kant never says that this has to take place in a public space. This means that Sennett, by inserting “public space” back into the system, winds up adopting an anti-public position. Let me explain. He claims that he is part of a “performative school” of thinking, which, “stripped of the jargon,” means simply that we focus “on how people express themselves to strangers.” It is an interesting ambition. Sennett does not say that people should go and live like these strangers for a while “in thought and place,” as Kant wanted. Rather, I am expected to express myself and it is up to the stranger to try to figure it out. But Kant wants us to do much more than just “express ourselves.” It is, in fact, precisely because of the stresses in the expressive exchange that Sennett then needs the public space to be real, where it serves not as a ‘public space,’ but as a space of temperance and surveillance. Expressing myself in a “public space” is presumably different that expressing myself in a “private space.” Kant’s modernity does not operate with that distinction and needs no such space.

Sennett, of course, is being reasonable, for Kant’s position is, in truth, almost nonsense. It is impossible to imagine a true Kantian modernity; but I am more interested in his nonsense than the liberalist repair job that tries to insert— all too quickly I argue—‘the public’ back into the machine.
I close with a thought experiment about the ‘real’ architecture of a Kantian world. First, it would be a city without houses. A house would be the symbolic locus of ‘family’ and there are no ‘families,’ so no houses. So what then would a Kantian city look like? One could envision any number of scenarios from linear cities to field cities to even a quasi-medieval town (but without the looming presence of cathedrals). Furthermore, at regular frequencies in the city, there would have to be meeting and seminar rooms, and other places where people can visit and talk. A university as such would be too top-heavy for Kant, but perhaps a loose infrastructure of exchange-and-learning centers might work. The city would also have a good deal of glass, both transparent and reflective, for in the Kantian world there is no mandate for private intimacy, as it is conventionally understood today, namely as an area outside the jurisdictional gaze of the State. ‘Private space’ as it conventionally might be called would be needed for sleep and rest, etc., but also as places to get away and think about things. To “think for yourself”—i.e. maxim one—you have to go to a place where one can shut down the interfering voices of all the thousands of people one knows. But this could happen just as easily on a bus or in a library as in one’s bedroom. So, imagine a city of streets and no freestanding houses, then imagine that the street facades and many of the interior walls are made of glass. But like Swiss cheese, there are dark boxes of space where individuals can spend time alone, perhaps reading a book or listening to music. Some of these places may be ‘owned’ by individuals, but most would be open to anyone. Next, imagine Encounter Buses that drive around the city and allow one to meet with people for short exchanges. Perhaps there could be Exchange Pods, where such meetings could be stretched out for hours or even days.

There would also be no professions in the modern sense. And that means there would be no architect professionals. As to how the city would get built, the closest model today that might work for Kant would be ‘design-build’ where clients and architects work together to solve problems. If everything were design-build, there would be no progress, no conceptual jump into a better world that is so critical to the Kantian Enlightenment project. We would, instead, have a continual repetition of the same. The genius, or several of them, would be required, meaning that the city would have an occasional building by Frank Gehry and Le Corbusier. We would study these buildings and appreciate them just like the other great works of art that make up the history of civilization. The city would even have an assortment of memorial statues dedicated to these geniuses as potential inspiration for those who think that they can be the next genius.

This Kantian city would be a relatively serious place. It is hard to imagine ballrooms or circuses in a Kantian city. Nor would there be major public buildings like courthouses and parliament buildings, since Kant wants us to work together to come up with our own laws, from the bottom up, so to speak, and not just swallow whatever comes down from above. Political parties would not exist, but there would be associ-
ations of people who would come together to define a particular common interest. Courthouses would not be banned, of course, but they would only exist in a small-scale way, distributed throughout the urban landscape as places that stabilize and reaffirm the thinking of the sensus communis. They would need to be ‘blended in’ and not freestanding edifices. In the Kantian city, there is no principle of citizenship, no police force, no army and even the sciences would be barely autonomous from the imprint of communal humanism. A place like MIT? Impossible. The city would have to be more like a village or town, networked across the landscape with other villages, but most certainly not cut-off or isolated. There would have to be places where foreigners could come and meet and indeed, most inhabitants themselves would have travelled widely in the great coming and going of cultural exchange. In the Kantian town there would be a wide range of hostels and hotels clustered around the Encounter zones. Residents would have to be accustomed to signs reading “Not currently in my office. Work will resume in two weeks.”

These quick and purposefully reductive ruminations on Kant are meant to show that, despite Kant’s wide influence in our thinking, we never created a fully Kantian modernity—perhaps thankfully. If we agree, this means that we live in a world of multiple modernities, which are largely modernities of practice. Kant’s modernity, if we can call it that, never became realized as such, even though pieces of it—in negation—became the basis for modernities of Hegel, Husserl and others. The point I am trying to make is that we have to recognize the productive strangeness of the Kantian world and the fact that its strategy of calculated impossibility pointed in some way to the very heart of modernity’s more invisible multiples.

5 Kant, The Critique of Judgment, 171.
6 Kant, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” in Berlinische Monatsschrift (December, 1784), 483.
In late 2010, global events began to demonstrate that the unique communication affordances of social media could support and empower marginalized groups. As has occurred with previous revolutions, associated technologies are frequently championed as the impetus for social change, reflecting a technological determinist standpoint on the liberatory potential of Western technology. While technology is clearly instrumental in Internet activism, the core processes at work in these movements are social, not technical. Setting up a blog in Burma, for example, is helpful only if potential contributors dare to post despite fears of arrest. Technology tends to overshadow actions on the ground and, more importantly, enjoys short-lived victories as new methods of surveillance and control emerge. Media outlets and platforms focus on current expansions of the prowess and impact of technology; their attention to painstaking, long-term efforts at economic and political reform usually wanes quickly after a revolutionary moment.

What motivations exist for labeling the Arab uprisings and other demonstrations as determined by social media effects? Foreign Affairs editor Evgeny Morozov answers “by emphasizing the liberating role of the tools and downplaying the role of human agency, such accounts make Americans feel proud of their own contribution to events in the Middle East.” The very appellation “media” in “social media” plays up the role of the technology “and thus overestimates [sic] its . . . importance.” To what extent do Morozov’s claims hold true? Such assertions prompt a deliberate reflection on the definition of publicness, causing us to question if socio/spatial processes during the uprisings have recontextualized the historical public sphere (Figure 1).

Distributed Publics

Of particular interest here is the definition of the public sphere via Jürgen Habermas as a discursive space, comprised of a set of practices separate from the state apparatus, in which individuals can discuss issues of the day in a free and unrestricted way. For Habermas the public sphere is not so much a particular space as a particular form of interaction, one that is present in diverse spaces and institutions. More specifically, it supports a form of argumentation that is universally accessible. A conversation is public not simply because it can be heard and overheard
by others but because it can be directed at anyone; this constitutes its publicness. While that idealized forum can consist of a town meeting or a discussion in a salon, coffeehouse, or union hall where people are physically present and interact face to face, Habermas also recognized the importance of the print industry—newspapers, pamphlets, and books. These began to exert a powerful influence on political life, as their readership implied the awareness of a participating reading community that could be addressed through print, independent of the state. He visualized this free, unitary, and accessible public sphere as a potential democratic utopia where individuals could discuss national issues and come to common agreement. However, this rise of the public is almost simultaneously undermined by the contradictions and conflicts of public space in the twentieth century. For Habermas, then, although our ideals regarding public space have endured, the current reality does not reflect these ideals. Moreover, today’s democracies are inadequate when measured against their own standards.4

The ambiguities and contradictions hinted at by Habermas take on new forms in contemporary discourse, as the term public is applied by scholars to new forms of media, new contexts, and new social practices.5 Granted that social media platforms contain conflicting tendencies, but have they radically altered the philosophical context of the public sphere? Social media platforms just as easily foreclose any possibility of an online public sphere, because of their relative anonymity, invisibility, and limited access (and thus their restricted audience), as well as their network morphology, which allows for monitoring of communication. These characteristics must be examined if we are to ascertain whether or not the structure of social media tends to close off possibilities or actually opens up new ones.

While social media has demonstrated that it can enable political activism, it has serious deficiencies related to individual privacy. Proprietary social networks, from Facebook to Twitter to Google+, effectively create a privatized public.6 There exist hidden issues, as all users are aware: The owners of these publics track each correspondence and purchase in order to better understand, analyze, and market their communities’ consumptive practices. Through the routine practice of data mining, analysis, and selling, online forums and actions are increasingly compromised. This demonstrates the impossibility of a privately-held commercial space, whether online or off, functioning as a true public space.7 For example, a privately-demarcated sidewalk or privately-owned shopping mall may prohibit political discussions or solicitation. Similarly, as long as a social media platform is privately held, it functions in the manner of a shopping mall and not that of a public street. Private ownership impinges in other ways—there is the ever-present possibility that government pressure might cause Facebook to suspend activists’ accounts and group pages used to plan rallies, perhaps for vaguely-specified reasons.8 Beyond data-mining and monitoring social sites, governments can also shut sites down, as has happened in Egypt, Iran, and China during times of social unrest.9 Like many countries, Egypt still has con-
Figure 1 Ministry of Social Solidarity, Cairo, Egypt, with damaged banner of former President Hosni Mubarak, 28 January 2011.

Figure 2 Mohandiseen, Cairo, Egyptian citizens take to the streets after Internet services had been effectively terminated. A protester uses a cameraphone to capture the crowd. Photographed 28 January 2011 using a RIM BlackBerry 9700.
tracts with Internet service providers (ISPs) that allow its government to limit Internet access nationally. It can also use its own state-owned service providers to harass and/or identify Internet-based organizers. Such regimes can also use social media for their own purposes, spreading disinformation on covertly-sponsored blogs.\textsuperscript{10}

While their membership is potentially open and accessible to all, social media sites require registration, thereby limiting conversation to fellow members. As sociologist Michael Gardiner argues, “The forming of new publics, as a process of collectivization, can only take place against the background of a new form of privatization, however, that of self and subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{11} While the criticism of psychological privatization could just as well be levied at print media, the exclusivity of social media is compounded by a technologically-supported interface. On the one hand, social media creates a space that mediates and extends discourse beyond face-to-face interaction. Yet on the other hand, that space is not universally accessible.\textsuperscript{12} Case in point, about one in nine Egyptians had Internet access in 2009, and only approximately nine percent of that group was on Facebook.\textsuperscript{13} Although access has increased dramatically, Internet accessibility in Egypt, as in the rest of the world, is limited to those who are literate and can afford it.\textsuperscript{14} According to a modern conception of a public, any such social exclusion undermines the democratic public sphere. The Internet can be a democratic public sphere only if, first, the critical agents make it so, that is, by utilizing open standards for messaging that constructs the context of communication and if, second, computers or other handheld transmission devices are freely and universally available and secure. At present these conditions still do not exist.

**State Interference and Surveillance**

As mobile technologies present increasingly sophisticated ways to engage with social media platforms, those with access find an acceleration of opportunities for political action and social justice. The ephemerality of a surreptitious counterpublic hidden within Twitter or Facebook, can allow for success partly through the medium’s very ubiquity.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, such subterfuge, like a Trojan horse, will work only once. While many online sites succeeded in their political objectives because of their unlikely stealth mode, it has not taken long for governments to become more adept at blocking or filtering Internet minority forums and counterpublics.

New agreements sanctioning government surveillance in the United States, England, Australia, and elsewhere were initiated immediately after the Arab Uprisings.\textsuperscript{16} The critical issue is that there are no legal restrictions yet in place protecting individual privacy, and government monitoring can take place without legal permission. As long as a social media platform is owned by a commercial entity, as with Facebook, Twitter, or Google+, it is open to government surveillance, although organizations may attempt to conceal this information from their members lest they lose personal data to other sites. National governments are not far behind media platforms in
using the same technology to locate dissenters for arrest and imprisonment or to paralyze opposition. Just as employers use social media sites to survey employees, nations watch their citizens’ political activities. By default, the structural configurations of the Internet records everything in the process of converting text, images and videos before they are transmitted and reproduced across the network. That structural capacity makes it possible for intelligence organizations to trace members of online groups and email.17

In response to increased surveillance, dissidents keep finding new ways to mobilize Internet resources to their advantage—Syrian rebels could recently be seen to be constantly creating new outlets for information and organizing news. Dissidents utilize certain web proxies (to bypass surveillance), instant messaging programs (which some argue are more difficult to track), and old-school word of mouth. In other countries witnessing unrest, people use mobile devices to capture video and disseminate it virally. In Syria, however, the government has tapped mobile phones in addition to landlines.18 Those who want to purchase a SIM card must provide information, which the government can use to track these individuals.19 This puts protestors in an increasingly dangerous position, as social media becomes the primary space of organization. Online transmissions of discussions can be traced and therefore are not secure. The digital trail of online information raises the possibility that every action is now potentially traceable—not just by the state but also by anyone able to pay for that information. As a result, many counterpublic sites, most recently in the Middle East, have responded by becoming mobile within the Internet, changing their IP addresses and passing on the new addresses to their members only face to face.

What marked the Arab uprisings, however, as both a case study and a discursive turn in the debate was not necessarily what occurred online but rather what happened when the government of Egypt terminated Internet access for four days in January 2011.20 Believing that limiting Internet and cell phone access would curtail political unrest and riots, the Egyptian government (as well as its United States counterpart) was unprepared for what actually occurred—residents left the digital public sphere, reappropriating Cairo’s streets and reconnecting the city before gathering in Tahrir Square. Looking closely reveals that the media blackout served to mobilize the uprising; people went through their neighborhoods, knocking on doors and spreading the word face to face. It was a combination of street tactics and Internet tactics that enabled the revolution.21 This transition from digital to nondigital political participation presented a significant intervention and socio-spatial formation in an era where online and offline possession of space and spatial presence are increasingly critical. The automatic response to injustice as evidenced in Tehran, Cairo, Madrid, and New York, and indeed throughout much of history, has been to gather and collectively demonstrate in the physical space of the streets.
This brings the discussion to one of the main points—social media challenges the Habermasian definition of a unitary public sphere, leaving us instead with something slippery and entirely provisional. Social media can be seen as a process of mutuality wherein structural media and human actions co-produce one another—a chain of circumstance connects them. A Facebook page may start out as a simple discussion forum. Sharing image postings of startling events, members may begin to discuss the implications of the latter. Opinions are voiced and heard, and a consensus begins to take shape. There are plans and organizational efforts. But can participation remain solely in the digital sphere? To “like” a political cause is not equivalent to engagement—one must show up and participate.

Physical space, however, is not unaffected by networked spaces of surveillance and publicity. As people leave the confines of their screens, offices, schools, and homes they move into the streets, making their presence known (Figure 2). A crucial point is that once the demonstration has moved into the streets or square—to a physical public space—it is videotaped by amateur, national and international news sources. An important circularity of imaging connects the active practices of a local networked public to global media attention. This point is hardly lost on government security forces that can upend the cycle by surveying individual images and video footage as a means to identify and arrest protestors. The inexplicit relations contained within networked technologies have equal power to limit as well as liberate.

Conclusion

Questions about the changing status of the public sphere continue to arise. The transformative power accessed and concealed within social media technologies is not always positive. As social justice movements challenge previously held notions concerning the construction of discursive space online and offline, a tension between Habermasian ideals of democratic publics and a Foucauldian observation of biopolitics and surveillance is emerging. Unlike Habermas’s unitary public, however, today’s social media is compromised and contradictory, flickering between visibility and invisibility. This indirect audience is technologically dependent and thereby unstable. As long as there is a possibility that these sites may be taken offline for any number of reasons (for example, through state political interference or an emergency response), or monitored and conversations traced, there is a significant diminishment in Habermasian democratic discourse. Social media technology has multiple dimensions and may be repurposed for various objectives. Governments regularly restrict and control information, in addition to creating their own content for political objectives. The design and interpretation of a technology may initially stabilize, offering analytical closure, but newly relevant social groups or interpretations may later destabilize it.
Social media is only the newest version of an ongoing problem related to mediated publics, yet the Internet’s displacement of the public sphere leaves many philosophical issues unresolved. Mediation more generally causes complications involving decontextualization, anonymity, and the blurring of public and private. At the same time, the lack of context of online spaces creates ambiguous audiences. Not all audiences are visible when a person is participating in online activity. Without control over context, the distinction between public and private becomes difficult to maintain.25 The public and the private, formerly defined for example in architecture as separate and distinct entities, are becoming increasingly intertwined by way of mediation, so that their differences are now negligible.26 The characteristics of social media, its structural properties—its commercialization of the market economy, its uneven accessibility, and its surveillance—all affect the social environment and thus influence people and their behaviors.27 They complicate boundaries and collapse distinct social contexts, all of which challenges the primacy of physical place in circumscribing public agency.28 As demonstrated by Internet activism, social media has not only permanently altered the discursive context of the historical public sphere; it has concurrently opened up a philosophical territory ripe for reconsideration.

1 In the case of the Arab uprisings, the underlying “social and economic conditions, coupled with rising prices and unemployment, political repression, lack of political freedoms, and corruption, called not only for a wide array of socioeconomic reform, but for political change as well. Protesters demanded higher wages, improved public services in the health, education, and transportation sectors, the elimination of government corruption, an end to police torture and arbitrary detention, and the creation of a fair judiciary system.” Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, “Protest Movements and Political Change in the Arab World,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (28 January 2011), 5.
6 Elsewhere I have written about non-proprietary social media and counterpublics; see The Public Space of Social Media: Connected Cultures of the Networked Society (Routledge 2013).
7 An exception is Zuccotti Park, a privately held public space (POPS)
that Occupy Wall Street (OWS) used as a staging ground and campsite. The park’s private status allowed for protesters to stay past municipal curfew hours.


9 Blocking access to a particular website cannot stop sophisticated Internet users from employing virtual private networks or other technologies to access unbanned IP addresses outside the country in order to access banned sites. In response to this problem, China shut down Internet access to all of Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the location of ethnic riots by Uighurs in 2009. More recently, Egypt followed the same tactic for the entire country.


12 The importance of email lies in its democratic nature: Email is an open protocol (RFC822). Anyone who can buy a domain name can host an email server and issue new email addresses. Domain names are democratically controlled by IANA/ IETF Internet protocol.


14 I refer not only to technological literacy but also to language literacy. Today, literacy in English is almost required; the majority of all web pages are written in English, although this situation is changing over time. In contrast, mobile device use for accessing the Internet is increasing among traditionally underrepresented groups.

15 Nancy Fraser identified the fact that marginalized groups are excluded from a universal public sphere, and thus it is impossible to claim that one group would in fact be inclusive. However, she claimed that marginalized groups formed their own public spheres, and termed this concept a subaltern counterpublic.


17 Conventional cell phones (as well as GPS capable devices) can be enlisted to locate dissidents. Cellular network providers can geographically pinpoint any cellphone connected to their network through pinging or triangulation.


20 The 2011 Egyptian Protests began on January 25, 2011. As a result, on January 25 and 26, the government blocked Twitter and later Facebook throughout the country. On January 27, various reports claimed that access to the Internet in the entire country had been shut down. The authorities responsible achieved this by shutting down the country’s official domain name system in an attempt to end mobilization of anti-government protests. As a result, approximately 93% of all Egyptian networks were unreachable by late afternoon. The shutdown happened within the space of a few tens of minutes, not instantaneously, which was interpreted to reflect companies having received phone calls one at a time ordering them to shut down access, rather than an automated system taking all providers down at once. Analysis by BGPMon showed that only 26 BGP routes of the 2,903 routes registered to Egyptian networks remained active after the blackout was first noticed; thus an estimated 88% of the whole Egyptian network was disconnected.

21 Seeta Pena Gangadharan, “Tyrannies of Participation” (panel discussion, ISEA, Sabanci University, Istanbul, 16 September 2011).

22 Joanne McNeil “Occupy the Internet,” in N+1 OWS Gazette 1.

23 Sylvia Lavin has written extensively about electronically mediated atmospheres and environments. Lavin uses flickering to refer to “neither an open nor closed space but an environmental mode held together by a vast array of moving particulate matter flickering between on or off.” See “Architecture Anime or Medium Specificity in a Post-Medium World,” 139, (paper presented at the 10th International Bauhaus Colloquium, Weimar, 2007).


26 Theorists such as David Beers insist that we are at a crucial moment of debate, when the parameters and scope of the study and understanding of social media are being set. David Beers, “Social Networking Sites: a Response to danah boyd & Nicole Ellison,” Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13 (2008), 516-529.

27 Meyrowitz, No Sense of Place.

In Hong Kong, the rate at which demonstrations have grown in recent years suggests the city houses a society in constant political turmoil. One of the most fiercely-debated issues is Hong Kong’s sovereignty to China—particularly the tension between its increasingly dependent relationship with the nation and the latter’s handling of human rights. This political polemic has given rise to a unique culture of demonstration, an exercise in freedom of speech that distances Hong Kong from China and targets two main parties: the Hong Kong and the Chinese governments.

Housed on the historic Government Hill until 2011, the headquarters of the Hong Kong government is the terminus for a number of demonstrations. The building itself is mundane amongst the spectacular banking headquarters of Central, a neighborhood so named because of its central location as well as its function as the economic, political and religious center of Hong Kong. Despite fading beside these exuberant neighbors, Government Hill is charged with historical connotations that make it a captivating object of study. Selected by the British for its privileged position on a knoll overlooking the harbor, the site soon became a conglomeration of governmental buildings including the Court of Final Appeal, the headquarters of the Government Offices, and Government House, the official residence for the Governors of Hong Kong. As the historic political center of Hong Kong, Government Hill remains politically charged based solely on its programmatic use.

In contrast to the central location of the Hong Kong government, China chose a site in Sai Wan for the Central Liaison Office (CLO), just outside the main economic and political cluster of Central. Officially an organ of the Central People’s Government, the CLO is responsible for the liaisons between Hong Kong and China, and was created to foster cultural, economic and social exchange. Formerly the Xinhua News Agency during the colonial era, the organization has been traditionally regarded as representative of the Communist Party in China. Thus, the CLO offices receive a fair share of demonstrations whenever protestors turn their demands and dismay towards the Chinese government.

One of the watershed moments in the post-colonial history of Hong Kong occurred on July 1st 2003—the sixth anniversary of the handover. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to demonstrate their concern over the government’s con-
troversial proposal of Article 23, which would have authorized the government the right to target freedom of speech within mass media.4 Considered a milestone in the democratic development and a turning point in the political culture of the city, the demonstration against Article 23 sparked an annual protest and became a medium through which residents voiced their discontent over the governance of Hong Kong. Demonstrations and protests have since been perceived as a method and means of democracy, a right of expression for the people, and a way to openly and publicly exercise the right to freedom of speech. Hong Kong has involuntarily become one of the few places whereby the Chinese government is forced to openly confront the public expression of opinion.

Protestors in Hong Kong have developed a culture whereby their actions result in maximum exposure to media reports through the creation of spectacle, transforming the streets into a medium of expression with tactics that recall those of Paris during May 1968.5 They are quick to exploit the tools of the media to carry their political message, knowing full well that eye-catching banners, whimsical acts, and confrontations with the police result in good television and more exposure. Thus, demonstrators have developed a habitual mannerism with an increasing focus on media and spectacle.6 From ritualistic dances symbolizing the death of democracy to the blocking of traffic that grinds Hong Kong to a standstill, every act of protest has been specifically designed to be conveyed conveniently and spectacularly through the media to create a lasting impact.7

Demonstrations in Hong Kong have become a fairly systematic affair. Protestors gather in a public space such as Victoria Park in Causeway Bay, a neighborhood located a forty-minute walk from Central, and march towards the office of the party of whom the request is being demanded. Once on site, the demonstrators hand their request in a large envelope to government officials. In reality, the message is already publicly expressed as reporters and passersby broadcast the procession through various social media. Slogans, signboards and other acts of expression are captured by traditional media outlets, as well as smartphones and digital cameras; instantaneously shared with the global public via images and videos uploaded to the Internet. These acts are deliberately brief to suit the attention span of the image-prone media, packaging and presenting the demonstration akin to an advertisement.8

This transformation in demonstration culture as a response to media has been notable in recent political protests in cities such as Cairo or Damascus, where the populist approach to representation has challenged the act of elitist suppression by the government. Twitter and Facebook have become the medium for rally cries, calling people to join demonstrations, while Flickr and Youtube transmit the message of the demonstrations to the world. These social platforms transcend traditional borders and bring reports from the public in the streets to computers and cell phones around the world.9 This shift in the medium of demonstrations creates a new,
Figure 1 Kenneth Ip, Multi-Function Room at the CLO, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective and section showing relationship between media, government and demonstrators.

Figure 2 Kenneth Ip, CLO from Queen’s Road Central, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective showing demonstration in progress.

Figure 3 Kenneth Ip, Programmatic Diagram, showing pivotal function of the design.

Figure 4 Kenneth Ip, Panda House, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective and section from inside the building.
contemporary spectacle, coinciding with cultural theorist Hal Niedzvieck’s concept of “peep culture.” Niedzvieck’s term describes how the development of technological means is transforming society to enjoy watching ourselves rather than celebrities. Spectacle, therefore, can be created by just about anyone.

Against this backdrop of a changing society brought about by technological advances in political demonstration, Hong Kong sits at a crossroads of neutrality and political polemic between the populist demands of the people and the elitist repression of the government. What if this division was disturbed by an architectural intervention with a political agenda? Following the recent relocation of the Hong Kong Government Offices to the new Tamar site in Admiralty, in what follows I analyze the implications and opportunities of relocating the offices of the CLO from its current location in Sai Wan, to the politically charged Government Hill. If architecture is inherently political, how does it extend beyond the boundary of the building into the realm of politics? More fundamentally, how can architecture respond to this new form of spectacle and arrogate a political position?

By shifting the destination of the demonstrations from Sai Wan to Government Hill, Central gains a new political charge through the symbolic placement of the Chinese government onto the historic seat of government in Hong Kong. The design for the new CLO reopens a public square at the top of Government Hill to the public— an action that was hindered post-1997 due to the Hong Kong Government’s concern over security. This gesture already portrays the Chinese government in a more welcoming light than the previous occupants of the site. Although the demonstration route remains public, the final destination of the public square lies in the jurisdiction of the CLO. It could be reserved by the CLO for furtive cultural use to coincide with the demonstrations, thus denying demonstrators the right to use the space by overlapping events and complicating the strong, homogenous presence of the demonstration. In essence, the message becomes clear: demonstrations are welcome, but only with the blessing of the CLO (Figure 1).

Suspended above this public square and below the office tower of the new CLO building is a multi-function room which hosts banquets and meetings for high ranking officials. Its hierarchal position is intentional: the room exerts spatial superiority over the demonstration space and imposes a sense of power over the protestors. The interior is likewise vigilantly designed to control the perception of the Chinese government and unfolding events in a dogmatic and prejudiced perspective. When filming the events in the multi-function room, reporters are only able to capture images of the political leaders with the banking headquarters—representative of the economy of Hong Kong—as a backdrop. Images of the protestors are hidden from view by the carefully staged architecture to project only that which is deemed politically acceptable in a deceiving *mise-en-scène*. 

Ip, Democratic Expression: Architecture Hijacks Spectacle
Figure 5 Kenneth Ip, Panda House, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective and section from outside the building.

Figure 6 Kenneth Ip, Main Staircase at the CLO, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective and section showing demonstration in progress with authoritative surveillance and the panda house closed on the left.

Figure 7 Kenneth Ip, Central Axis in CLO, Hong Kong, 2010, perspective and section showing demonstration in progress.
In considering the context of the new CLO building, the significance stretches beyond the physical site to the realm of historical connotations. Aside from the obvious symbolic gesture of allowing the public back onto Government Hill in a fallacious display of democracy, the axis of the building now aligns with Queen’s Road Central, a street that alludes to the colonial era of Hong Kong. A large screen embedded into the façade of the building is designed to project images down Queen’s Road, allowing the CLO to use media as a means to influence the perception of events. During a demonstration, as people march through the building and onto Government Hill, contrasting images are shown on the screen of the building. As photos of protestors demanding democratic reforms are posted onto Flickr and Facebook, images of natural disasters such as the Qinghai Earthquake appear in the background of each photograph. The contrasting imagery causes one to question both the priorities of the government and the requests of the demonstrators. This is intentional, as to create a disparity between the unfolding events and the official government position—an attempt on the part of the government to influence the sympathy of the public (Figure 2).

The design for the CLO relies heavily on its programmatic arrangement, transforming the building into a political instrument. To further exemplify the Chinese government’s generosity towards Hong Kong, the building contains a panda house, allowing the public the opportunity to view this icon of Chinese culture. A long-standing practice by the Chinese government since the Tang Dynasty, pandas have been given as gifts to other nations as a sign of friendship, an act known as panda diplomacy. The panda is therefore not merely an animal, but a political tool that symbolizes the goodwill and friendship of the Chinese government. By including a panda house within the building and allowing public access, the architecture of the building becomes synonymous with the intentions of panda diplomacy. The building is transformed from its forbidding representation to a symbol of the government’s benevolence (Figure 3).

The programmatic distribution of the building is balanced on two axes that intersect around the panda house. By balancing the program of the building on a central pivotal point, the building becomes programatically fragile, thereby allowing people to hijack its spaces. During demonstrations, entry to the panda house is closed off to the general public, thus transforming the panda into a tool of frustration against the demonstrators. This singular programmatic decision formally interprets, for the public, the intent of the protestor as selfish and the government as sympathetic. Public perception of the panda and its associated meaning of friendliness from China is hinged upon the act of demonstration through representation in mass media (Figures 4, 5).

The panda is both a political instrument to win public perception through media as well as a device that reveals the political standpoint of the viewer. To appreciate the
panda in its most ideal environment, the visitor must enter the building and look at the panda from within the walls of the government building. Once inside, the panda and the visitor are positioned on the same level, allowing the visitor to see and appreciate the panda in its bright and airy environment. In contrast, the view of the panda from the outside is fully compromised as the viewer is only allowed to observe the panda from the upper viewing platform, separated by a height of eight meters, glare, and reflection. The axial arrangement of the panda house also creates an unobstructed view to the exhibition space, which could be used to show propaganda and forms a subconscious, persuasive backdrop for the observer from the outside (Figure 6).

An atmosphere of surveillance is immediately sensed through the building as one enters through Queen’s Road Central. This symbolic gesture of allowing access to Government Hill is compromised by the panoptic effect created by the programmatic arrangement of the CLO’s media and security department. Housed in a box that overhangs the main staircase, the media department of the CLO watches over the demonstration route through narrow slit windows. As the demonstrators pass through the building and up the staircase onto Government Hill, they are under the impression of being watched by the government. This effect is further enhanced by the location of the security department of the CLO, located off the main axis of the staircase and also featuring deep slit windows that face the demonstration route. The CLO complex is designed to intimidate the demonstrators and enhance the sense of discomfort in the space, creating the impression of constant surveillance (Figure 7).

The influence of media in the design for the CLO stretches beyond that of mere perception to that of intimidation and control. As demonstrators adapt and utilize mass media to create a new form of demonstration culture in Hong Kong, so too does architecture respond to this new challenge of political expression. The delicate axial arrangement of the CLO is programatically fragile and subject to media representation, employing sympathy as a political tool through the manipulation of views and visual connections. Space can no longer be neutral within the architecture of the CLO, as it aggressively provokes the two opposing sides in the struggle for the freedom of speech. The spectacle of the project is found not in its architectonic form but in the interaction between various programs as appropriated by the different parties; relying on the representation of the event in the media to create a spectacle that suppresses the demonstrators themselves. Architecture becomes a politically charged entity through its influence on the perception of mass media, transforming the tool of the populist masses into one of elitist oppression.
The Hong Kong Government has since moved to a new complex constructed on prime real estate on the waterfront of Admiralty, just to the east of Central. Built in an International style that continues the architectural language of conjuring no colonial or Chinese sentiments as did the building on Government Hill. The complex design was driven by “Door Always Open”, an architectural metaphor implying an open and accessible government.


2 Kate Mattock, This is Hong Kong: The Story of Government House (Hong Kong: Studio Publications, 1994).

3 The controversial bill was successfully shelved following the mass protests which erupted following its introduction, but since 2003, 1 July Marches have been an annual event which rallies the people of Hong Kong to protest and demonstrate for various political concerns. The annual occurrence of the event speaks towards the political unrest within the city.


5 David Rockwell and Bruce Mau, Spectacle (London: Phaidon, 2006).


11 This is evident in the recent visit of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper to China, where he was rewarded with two pairs of pandas for the Calgary and Toronto zoo. The visit was touted by the Canadian media to be “...a clear sign Sino-Canadian relations have moved to a different level, as Harper had claimed the night before.” The Toronto Star, 9 February 2012.
Despite the humanistic roots of their modern profession, architects are first and foremost service providers. Their output, design and building, requires large layouts of funds, labor, and resources. They thus have to work with patrons (clients or financiers in our modern usage, whether they are individuals or collective entities) who have the means to finance and implement their designs. The architecture that the patrons pay for, and about which they usually have the final say, is perforce subject to their social, political, and economic predispositions. It is thus not neutral.

However, architecture changes once it leaves the realm of design and enters the social space. There, it acquires functions and meanings that may not have been intended or anticipated at the design stage or wished for by the first patrons. History is full of such examples. Royal and princely palaces, for instance, have become museums, schools, and offices after either the old political regimes disappeared or new economic realities forced their alteration. Churches and mosques have been converted into banks, theaters, and sometimes residences, when real-estate pressures and a diminishing holiness of religious institutions provided the rationale for such action. Countless other elaborately private or sacred spaces became public or profane after a change in political or social order, or under pressure from financial imperatives.

The reverse also happens, as when private citizens endow their homes for a religious or public purpose, such as a school, shrine, or museum. In our late-capitalist times, the inflated desires of the wealthy produce new forms of architectural transformation, as when celebrities or business moguls appropriate public or monumental architecture for their personal use. They sometime take over the palaces of old nobility as their residences, signaling the shift from hereditary privilege to monetary entitlement. At other times, corporations or governments make decisions that are motivated solely by economic considerations, which alter the forms and functions of entire cities and human settlements, such as when they relocate large-scale production or when they privatize former public spaces and redevelop the sites into profit-generating properties.

Effecting these changes, by and large, has been the domain of the powerful and the rich: the social elite, wealthy individuals or corporations, and governments’ high officials. These groups assume a right to architecture by virtue of their power, which is
usually, but not always, implicit. There is a long history to this practice. For thousands of years, architecture was indeed the unadulterated expression of power: temples for the gods and their priests, palaces for the living sovereigns and mausolea for the dead ones, castles for the mighty princes, and lavish repositories of knowledge for the educated elites. The poor, both rural and urban, had their vernacular: simple, self-built, rooted in its place and tradition, purportedly timeless, and essentially missing the cachet of an architect.

The right to architecture, like other exclusive rights customarily held by the nobility and the clergy (or their equivalents in other cultures), expanded over time. New classes of patrons managed to obtain it at the dawn of the modern period: merchants, financiers, industrialists, bureaucrats, professionals, and artists. After the Industrial Revolution, the new monied classes began to compete with the old aristocracy over patronizing architecture, although they did not totally displace it (note for instance the American fascination with everything pertaining to the British royalty). Despite the major social upheavals of the 19th and 20th century, entire social segments remained without the right to architecture: the poor, the working class, or the socially marginal, particularly in developing and under-developed countries. They had no access to private architecture by virtue of their inability to pay for it. And although they constituted the majority of users of public architecture, they rarely had a say in its design. In fact, most public architecture was designed to contain and control them, even when methods were devised to poll their opinions as groups and to include these results in design guidelines for large public projects.

Revolution, the demand for radical change pursued by radical means, may be seen as the final resort of those who have no right to architecture: the urban poor crowded in slums and banned from city amenities and the social and cultural misfits disenfranchised by conventional public rights. These groups erupt in revolution in moments of attenuated hardship to physically occupy the spaces in the city that they can collectively access. These are the spaces designated as public: streets and squares, state agencies, churches and mosques. In the actions of revolutionaries, there is a hunger to claim the spaces made in their collective name as their own. Occupying such spaces and filling them with their marching, shouting, graffiti, and temporary structures is indeed akin to owning them, at least temporarily (Figure 1). It is an expression of a will to seize the public space as an alternative to the missing right of legal possession. Even as the revolutionaries destroy or disfigure the public space in rioting and looting, the act of destruction may be seen as yet another form of possession since they otherwise have no means to owning that space.

Architecture can be revolutionary. This occurs if its established role in a social order is challenged or even overthrown by acts aimed at the functions and meanings ascribed to it. These acts come in different forms. They could be sudden incursions during a revolt, or a mass protest, such as when a street meant for vehicular circu-
Figure 1 Cairo, Tahrir Square: Graffiti against the Military Council on the walls of the Mugamma’ (the Main Governmental Complex), Fall 2011.

Figure 2 Gando, Burkina Faso, School, completed 2001.

Figure 3 Rudrapur, Bangladesh, School, completed 2005, detail of bamboo trusses.
lation becomes a swarm of angry bodies marching in protest, or when a mosque meant as a calm place for prayer is hastily turned into a field clinic to help the wounded, or when a square, landscaped and arranged as traffic node becomes a sea of people with placards, flags, and raised fists asserting the people’s demands. This is how revolutions transiently revolutionize public space. We all witnessed such brief but buoyant outbursts of spatial transformation in various squares around the globe in the last decade from Kiev, to Tehran, to Washington D.C., to Beirut, and, in the last year, in the various cities of the Arab Spring from Tunis to Cairo, to San’a, Manama, Benghazi, Hama and Homs and in the American cities of the Occupy Movement.

But revolutionary architecture can also be designed. Architects of the heroic modern age between the two world wars tried to do just that. They wanted their architecture to disrupt all established orders: spatial, aesthetic, formal, historical, political, and social. Having theoretically argued their case, the modernists plunged into their architectural revolution armed with modern technology and materials, an optimistic spirit of rehabilitation after the devastating First World War, and a renewed, and in hindsight, naive, trust in the weight of creativity and design. They largely succeeded in the architectural categories they aimed to reform, and we still live with the vestiges of their innovations even after the overlays of postmodernism, deconstructivism, and a host of other (superficially) revisionist movements masked huge swathes of modern architecture. However, although they had all the good intentions, the modernists were much less successful in revolutionizing the crucial socio-political role of architecture. This was due, to a great extent, to the profession’s ever-present need of considerable funding to fulfill its purpose. Indeed, hardly any of the renowned modernists broke away from the clutches of the patronage system, whether their patrons were individuals, corporations, or governments, or looked for financing measures that bypassed the system and ensured their independence. Even when they built large housing projects for the masses after the great displacements of the First World War, the modernists were unable to engage directly with these clients who had no means of funding and therefore lacked the right to architecture. The architects still had to work through large corporations or governmental authorities, which commissioned the projects, financed them, and provided the architects’ fees. Not even the eminent architect for the poor, the Egyptian Hassan Fathy, sought a different way to involve his real clients, the poor peasants of New Gourna, than through the commission ordered and paid for by the Egyptian government.

It is only in the last few decades that a truly revolutionary architecture became a possibility, as many architects recognized the right to architecture as a fundamental right that should be extended to all people, those who can pay for it and those who cannot, just like other more familiar universal rights such as health care and education. These architects began to search for new methods of professional engagement with clients who could not pay for architecture. Their solutions vary. Yet they all share
an awareness of the heavy burden that the framing of their profession as service-for-hire exacts. They all also actively immerse themselves in searching for alternative ways to finance architectural projects for “clients” who do not enjoy the right to architecture, i.e., who cannot pay themselves. This funding component, added to the many other aspects of community involvement in designing, building, and promoting architecture, suggest that these architects believe in the universality of the right to architecture. It should be distinguished from other methods of mass funding of design that emerged in the last few years, such as crowdsourcing à la Kickstarter, since it is consciously focused on those who cannot afford architecture but have a right to it. It should also be distinguished from the so-called Humanitarian Design, even though the two share the impulse of doing good and the concentration on designing projects in impoverished nations in Asia and Africa. The architects I describe fundamentally believe in their “clients’” right to architecture rather than in their own humanitarian aspiration to provide that architecture. Choosing to work with impoverished communities in poorly served and remote places is their way to insist on the universality of that right.

Two recent examples illustrate this new trend. The first is a school in the village of Gando in Burkina Faso in West Africa. Completed in 2001 and designed by architect Francis Diebedo Kéré, this primary school was built cooperatively by the entire village community. Among other environmentally responsive details, the designer invented a double roof structure of adobe and tin that reduces the heating effect of the sun and passively provides for a substantially cooler interior (Figure 2). The most original aspect of the project is its financing: the architect, who is a native of the village and the first of its inhabitants to study abroad, initiated the idea for the school and became its principal fundraiser. He established an NGO and collected the entire school's cost from community members living abroad while he was completing his architectural education in Berlin.

The second example takes the model of the architect’s commitment to working for the disenfranchised a step further. For a new school building in the village of Rudrapur in Bangladesh, architect Anna Heringer, who is not a native of the place, fully identified with the project and the community and took on the multiple tasks of conceptual planner, architect, fundraiser, and recruiter. The school, commissioned by a Bangladeshi NGO and completed in 2005, was funded by donations raised by another NGO in the architect’s hometown in Germany, in which Heringer played a major role. But the most important role that the architect played in the fundraising scheme was to convert the charity of her hometown denizens into a capital managed by the Bangladeshi NGO so as to lessen the humanitarian form a direct transfer of the funds might have assumed. This was a good indication of her sensitivity to treating her clients as partners rather than as recipients of benefaction. Heringer enlisted the help of the community and of German and Austrian engineers to develop a construction and structural system that uses but improves on the performance and
durability of the traditional materials of bamboo and adobe (Figure 3). The result is a stunning and simple structure that not only fits in its environment but also embellishes it, while providing clean, beautiful, and climatically comfortable spaces for the young students of the village. But most importantly, this project, like the school in Burkina Faso and other recent projects, proves that architects can practice their profession outside the traditional financial paradigm.

The two schools received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Gando in the 2004 cycle, and Rudrapur in the 2007 cycle. This may be a sign of a changing attitude in some professional circles toward this new form of architectural commitment. It is, however, difficult to deduce from the award reports whether the redefinition of the architect’s mission to include participation in the funding process played a role in the decision to award these projects or not. Both projects, after all, deserve recognition for their environmental and structural ingenuity and community involvement. Nevertheless, the award brought these projects to the attention of the world architectural community and raised awareness of this creative and yes, revolutionary, form of practicing architecture. Emerging architects now have access to a number of models to learn that architecture can and should become a right for all, even those who cannot afford it.
As a way of thanking The Platypus Affiliated Society for organizing this much-needed discussion and also marking some common ground, I want to begin by citing a little piece of history that, I suspect, lies somewhere in the background of the questions to which they have asked us to respond. If you go tomorrow to the Museum of Modern Art—which you must—and spend some time with the beautiful “Inventing Abstraction” show curated by Leah Dickerman, you will see amongst other “ruins” of the Soviet avant-gardes a diminutive study by El Lissitzky, executed in gouache, ink, and pencil, for a 1920 project commemorating the assassinated Spartacist leader, Rosa Luxemburg. I deliberately refrain from showing you the drawing since you really must go to the show, but also because I want it to stand as a placeholder for the great double bind of modernist aesthetics, and particularly, of that elusive thing called “abstraction” as it crosses paths with that other elusive thing called “revolution.” Suffice it to say that the drawing, which measures about 4 x 4 inches, consists of a deep black square with razor thin white edge, set within (or floating above) a red circle, off center, and surrounded by a concentric array of Suprematist shapes in red, black, white, and speckled gray, which at once appear to be attracted centripetally to the picture’s decentered center, and to spin off centrifugally from it, while a larger pair of black and gray bars seems to slip under or behind it. Over (or under) the black-square-in-red-circle is written, in half-obliterated Cyrillic characters, the name “Rosa Luxemburg.”

There is nothing the least bit original about citing this little piece of modernist esoterica in this way. Most notably, the art historian T.J. Clark has offered a vividly dialectical reading that pits Lissitzky’s ambivalent, proto-propagandistic realism—captured in the half-obliterated text—against the more uncompromising abstraction of his mentor, Kasimir Malevich. Clark, for whom “modernism is our antiquity,” ultimately judges Malevich the more faithful of the pair to the unbearable contradictions of the already-ruined revolution. Wherein Malevich’s original, unmarked black quadrilateral (1915), unenlightened, so to speak, by writing, manifests a kind of constitutive revolutionary darkness.
But tables turn. Which is to say that our problem today may no longer be quite the realism-versus-abstraction problem faced by Lissitzky, Malevich, or their colleagues at UNOVIS, in Proletkult, or in any of the other vanguard cultural-political organizations of that heady time and place. Nor is it simply that the revolutionary or reformist intentions of the European avant-gardes ran tragically aground on the shores of the capitalist international, or even more misleadingly, that they were mysteriously “co-opted” by very real reactionary aesthetes at the Museum of Modern Art and their corporate sponsors.

The problem, instead, is to define the problem. Not accidentally, in the Futurist 0-10 exhibition in Petrograd (1915-1916), Malevich hung his black square (it’s not quite a square) in the place traditionally reserved for the religious icon in Russian peasant culture. Today, it is not difficult to see that this was not only an act of transgression; it was a premonition. For it is no secret that under neoliberal capital, abstraction itself has become iconic, in a strictly religious sense. So my answer to Platypus’s double question, “Are we still–were we ever–postmodern?” is yes, but only now, because architecture has finally become truly abstract.

This is important not because it gives fresh impetus to the never-ending style wars, but because it redefines our categories. Again, I am not saying anything original in associating postmodernism with abstraction. Among others, Fredric Jameson has done so eloquently and at length. But you must understand that what one means here by abstraction is not fully captured by the usual distinction between abstract and figural art, or by the endless, undecidable debates as to which approach is more or less revolutionary, whether in the political or artistic sense. What I mean is something like a “concrete abstraction,” but with a slight difference from the common Marxian sense. If, for example, circulatory financial instruments like derivatives and the values they produce are abstract, the Bank of America, as an institution, a set of buildings, and a group of people, is concrete. The tables turn, however, when we recognize that that institution, those buildings, and those people are also in some sense constitutively abstract, in the sense of being interpellated as objects and subjects, in utterly tangible, material ways, into the language, practices, imaginaries, and infrastructures of capital, a priori.

In this light, it may seem—and perhaps rightly so—that the only truly revolutionary cultural activity is to be found in the real-world, hands-on, agit-prop art actions in and around Occupy Wall Street, the Alter-globalization movement, the Arab Spring, and other insurgent formations worldwide. Architecture in its traditional or “disciplinary” forms is nowhere to be found in this mix, being so thoroughly hardwired to power precisely through its ability to deliver—on-demand—an aestheticized abstraction (the icon in all its iterations) that complements and even reproduces the rush of religious fervor generated by—and generating—worldwide financialization. In the midst of
all of this, there are plenty of revolutionary or at least dissenting architects, many
of whom are students, and many of whom find the courage to speak out against
injustice and dispossession on a daily basis and act accordingly. But there is no rev-
olutionary architecture. Unless, that is, we are speaking of the sort of revolution that
begins from the right.

From the other direction, architecture, even in its most insurgent, grassroots varia-
tions, is at best today to be found on the side of reform. Of course, Le Corbusier’s
now-clichéd question, “Architecture or Revolution?” suggests mutually exclusive
categories; but that question’s rhetorical nature also symptomatically represses the
much more poignant and much more famous question posed by Rosa Luxemburg in
1900: “Reform or Revolution.” In western Europe by 1923, when Le Corbusier wrote,
the enlightened reform of housing, of the city, and of the republican institutions of
liberal capitalism was well under way, as represented, for example, in all of the proj-
ects—functionalist, formalist, and historicist—designed a few years later for the ill-fated
League of Nations, including his own.

Luxemburg, for whom Mies van der Rohe also designed and built a memorial in
1926, had fought all her life against such compromises, which she regarded as
opportunistic capitulations. But even in her polemical struggles in Germany with the
reformist Social Democrats—whose leftward politics and policies, we all know, make
today’s American Democrats look like flaming neocons—her question, “Reform or
Revolution,” names a double bind, a tangle tighter than a mere contradiction that can
only be cut with the sharpest of knives, like a Dadaist collage. Here architecture can
be something much more than an “art of the possible.” For rather than merely offer-
ing modest ways to make the brutal world system a little bit more humane, architec-
ture harbors the capacity—precisely because of its complicity, and not despite it—to
conjure, like Lissitzky’s little drawing with its ghostly little letters, the spirit of Rosa Lux-
emburg. For every small reform, however earnest, however limited, potentially bears
her revolutionary question within itself, and it is well within architecture’s resources
to ask, loudly and defiantly: “Is that all you have to say?” Or, to put it another way: Is
that the best you can do?

This also means recognizing today how the tables have turned, and how the most
insidious propaganda for things as they are rather than things as they should be is
to be found in the most abstract, most ethereal, most otherworldly—and yes, most
outwardly sophisticated—architecture. As in past revolutions, actual or virtual, archi-
tecture-as-religious-icon is therefore the first thing to be demolished if the glimmers
of other futures are to remain visible. For the so-called triumph of neomodernist
abstraction over historicist figuration is what makes architecture finally—and belat-
edly—postmodern. At last, when the real estate developer demands world-class
architecture above all else, architects have entered the bank vault, the headquarters
of the new world order, only to find nothing there—except, that is, Malevich’s black
square hanging in the corner. Rather than celebrate this nothing or give it metaphysical gravitas, it is time to see it for what it is. Nor can one be satisfied with opposing a resistant (or supposedly more real) architecture of brick to the apparently weightless balloons of financialization. For inside the empty vault, or in the real estate bubble or balloon, the air is thick and stale. And from its material, molecular density can be assembled concrete tools with which to gently tap, or firmly smash, the idols of our day, just as Nietzsche applied his philosophical hammer to the pieties of idealist, Apollonian classicism.

What are these tools? A precondition for that question is the desire to change things, really and genuinely. Of this, I am afraid, there is little evidence in today’s architecture, perhaps by definition. Instead, there are abundant noble attempts to solve pragmatically the problems, like climate change and poverty, thrown up willy-nilly by the status quo, rather than a concerted effort to reject and reformulate the world system out which these problems emanate. So too with abstraction, which was once the harbinger of other things and is now the very emblem of complacency. Faced with this one can only repeat, with Rosa Luxemburg and with so many others then and now: It does not have to remain this way.

Figure 1 Tunney Lee, John Wiebenson, James Goodell, Kenneth Jadin, Resurrection City, 1968, view from Washington Monument.
The following conversation between Tunney Lee, one of the designers of Resurrection City (Figure 1), and Lawrence Vale took place on 14 December, 2011.

Lawrence Vale: So when and how did you first get involved in the design and planning of Resurrection City?

Tunney Lee: I had an office in the Art and Architecture Center called The New Thing, which was being run by Topper Carew who was a Howard University student, but deeply engaged in the movement—this is 1967. And, he had all the connections to the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). They were organizing the Poor People’s March, in Washington. So he was the connection.

LV: So as this started to grow in early 1968, there was a team that came together to think about where in Washington the Poor People’s March might go?

TL: The SCLC told us that they were on the way, and that they would need a place to land. They said people were coming from all over the country, caravans and so on, and they would need to house several hundred people.

LV: Did they give you an estimate right from the start?

TL: They gave us a very broad range, because nobody actually knew how big it was going to be. The number was more precise as the date got nearer, because people had signed up, and some were already on their way. And there were local people who were going to stay in DC and were coming for the day.

LV: Visibility seems pretty crucial in a march, to have a poor people’s campaign that arrives in Washington—there has to be a priority to being seen once you’re there.

TL: We did a very technical job—we prepared a map that showed some of the possible sites (Figure 2). Here: size, access, topography, symbolism, visibility, security, sanitation, utilities.

LV: To me the choice to end up adjacent to the Mall and in the monumental core of Washington seems one of the most important decisions, was that always the first aspiration?

TL: Yes, obviously the first choice was somewhere in the monumental core—the Mall, or other locations. But we were just showing all the possibilities. This map is already cleaned up, because we had also Rock Creek Park, and the National Airport. In fact one of our favorites was the National Airport, because it had asphalt, and toilets, and restaurants, and terrific access. In fact, part of the interesting thing is that we were continuously monitored by the FBI. We knew that because we had our offices in The New Thing. We would leave our notes up along with working maps. One of those included Rock Creek Park and the National Airport. One of the newspapers, I think it was the Star, published our map. It was redrawn, but it said, “Marchers contemplate...”
The panic that resulted from that was interesting. And then we obviously took those out, because Rock Creek Park was not topographically workable. But part of it is, we needed to give the best professional advice to the SCLC people who were doing the negotiating with the federal government. They wanted to come in as rational and reasonable, and say we’ve looked at all possible sites. For example, we’ve looked at Gallaudet College, but it’s too far away, and we should be on the Mall. But nothing happened until King was assassinated. I don’t know where we would have gotten if that had not happened. Because there was a lot of feet dragging, and talking, and after King was assassinated, we got the site.

LV I could imagine that going either way, that at a time when there was rampant unrest across the country, one could imagine the federal officials deciding that the last thing the country needed was to put that unrest on display. So what is it and who is it that stepped forward to say this should go front and center, just off the main axis of power?

TL I’m sure that was a debate within the federal government, but Washington DC was a tinderbox, that moment, this is ’68, and there had already been riots in Detroit in ’67, and DC was hot. If they had said no, they were afraid the city would erupt, and of course DC was majority black at that time.

LV And there had been those confrontations in many other cities after King’s assassination.

TL King’s assassination really erupted all over the country, yes, including DC.

LV So, this was seen as a way of diffusing tension by saying ‘Come in an organized way into the very center of power’?

TL Right. Well also some symbolism because King had given his speech at the Lincoln Memorial. But I think it was like, partly it was isolated a bit, very few people actually go to that side of the Mall.

LV And then, once the site is decided, your team attempts to design a community with a Main Street and some ideas about compound sizes and things like that. I’m wondering whether you see that spatial organization as meant to mirror or reinforce or inspire a kind of social and political order. What kinds of things were on your minds when thinking about the nature and form of a settlement that ought to take place on that prized site?

TL Our approach was classic modernist city planning. Because the site was long and narrow, we organized the residential areas into clusters like neighborhoods and communal services along a spine so that they were accessible to all.

LV But there was a main axis down the middle that was intended to be more of a public nature and then increased domains of privacy possible within that.

TL Right, just like a Main Street idea.

LV But, what was most important to convey with the Main Street itself, in terms of what public message it should have? I mean, why should there be a public realm in Resurrection City?

TL I think we were a bunch of functionalists. I think the symbolism came from the political side. You know, they asked us to locate a City Hall and we said, terrific, we’ll put it right at the—

LV But where would you want to put a city hall, if there was a place that was supposed to be for the Mayor of Resurrection City, is that the way normally—

TL It was more than symbolic. We put the City Hall in the middle of the Main Street so that it was as accessible to as many residents as possible since it had telephones, welfare services, security etc. Near the head of the main pedestrian entrance, which is from the Lincoln Memorial side, we put the registration and information center.

LV So it would be the same principle that would have applied in the design of Chandigarh and Brasília, with a kind of head for the leadership, as opposed to an alternative spatial design for a different kind of organization.

TL Not really... Our team had Jim Goodell from Penn, who was influenced by David Crane and I had worked for David Crane. [John] Wiebenson was a GSD graduate, Ken Jadin was a Penn graduate too. So we were very much influenced by Crane (who
had proposed an alternative to Corbu’s Chandigarh and his ideas of the linear city which grew incrementally through the work of a thousand designers. Also essential was the Capital Web where public facilities were organized, so it gives order and then other things could be more flexible. But, symbolism, I have to say I don’t think we thought much about it—we were really functionalists.

LV And what about the implementation of this? You mention ‘City of a Thousand Designers.’ How much of your organizational vision for what the place could be was actually buildable and implementable, and how much of it was altered by either self-built processes or other kinds of things that you didn’t anticipate as designers?

TL We had a basic layout that we assumed would be altered as people built on it. But the extent of how people altered surprised us. You see in some of the early photographs, the first batch that was done before people came. It was built by a bunch of volunteers, who just lined up the structure. The first group came and immediately re-organized it (Figure 3).

LV And what were the surprising changes that people brought to it that you didn’t anticipate?

TL Well they made more and different clusters. They organized courtyards. In the slide show you can see that depended on the size of the group (Figure 4). The nice thing about these structures was that two people could just move them. So they would take the structures and organize them in the way they wanted to. There were a couple of families that took two or three of them and put a group of families together. There was a group from Detroit that came, and a group from New York who were one of the most organized, they made a bigger compound than most. But the most surprising thing was how they made multi-level structures. We never anticipated that. We expected people would shift these things around—that’s why the central spine was so important, we didn’t want anything there, just daycare centers, food, all along the center, and then people could sort of organize around it, which they did. But the multiple-level structures people made were amazing (Figure 5).

LV Some of this probably results from the initial expectation that this would be built of tents. I gather the tents were not donated which is what led to all of the use of wood-frame construction. How do you think it would have been different as a tent-based city rather than a 2x4-based city?

TL Well I think you saw that at Occupy Boston and Zuccotti park. Tents would tend to be more anarchistic, because they have no particular shape to them, so people would just fit them into random spaces. The reason the tent-shape came up, was that we were looking for a very simple thing to build, we wanted 4x8 pieces of plywood cut at best once, and 2x4s, and so the tent structure, the A-frame, was certainly the simplest.

LV Right. So you had some of the profile of the tent without actually having the free organization of a tent city.

TL Right.

LV I assume you can handle the increase of people by having a module that’s repeatable as you get larger groups, but what about the types of people, the assumptions about single people coming versus families? The assumption is that most people were coming from a great distance and would have no other place to stay. Did you assume that this was singles versus people coming as families?

TL We were told there were families coming, so several daycare centers were built. In fact we didn’t build them. What happened was the volunteer groups from DC who organized the daycare centers worked with the people who came, they took the structures and organized them, to make some of the daycare centers and several structures. So we made the assumption that there were going to be all kinds of people, and that there were going to be children.

LV And did you plan to separate out the zones where families with children would live, or could people just choose? For instance, in the settlement that you made first, before people arrived, what did you assume about families versus singles for that first phase?
Figure 2 Resurrection City, 1968, Map showing possible sites.

Figure 3 Resurrection City, 1968, interior, painted and furnished.

Figure 4 Resurrection City, 1968, general view, lean-to compound.

Figure 5 Resurrection City, 1968, lean-to with A-frame creating second floor.
TL It was open for use, that is, whoever arrived first, occupied that first part. Families generally stayed with their groups, where they came from. Although there was some movement where several families clustered for the kids sake, I think around the daycare center. But all original settlements were by geography.

LV So that's my next question. How did people self-select socially, and what is your estimate of the racial and ethnic breakdown of the people that were there? Did the separation by point of origin also lend itself to separation on racial and ethnic lines, or was Resurrection City more of a mixed community than people had come from?

TL I think almost everybody arrived in groups—my guess would be about 80 to 90% black, there was a Chicano group coming from California, there were some white Appalachian groups, but they were small—they were visible, but they were small and they were segregated not by race but by geography. And there was more mixing than you would have seen elsewhere in 1968. They were there because of King, it was all inspired by him. And people did behave—now, if we were in existence longer, I don’t know.

LV What about your own role during the six weeks when this was operative? Where were you and how much of the daily life of this place did you experience?

TL Well there were four of us—the planning group, it was run by Wiebenson, he was the senior member, and we had all tasks within it to plan different things. We were all involved in the early prefabrication and organizing materials which took place in Maryland. We didn’t have the exact site until very late, and Wiebenson went out to mark the site for the different uses with one of those things that you use for marking football fields. He did it and then they came and cut the grass [laughs].

LV And, do you feel that that was just a coincidence, the day to cut the grass, or do you feel that was somebody deliberately trying to undermine...

TL No, no. I don’t think any of us felt that. I think the Park Service was very helpful, they really were, it just wasn’t coordinated. So he just had to come over and do it over again. But he was the guy who did it, because he had the distances in mind. Then we took turns being there. We were all there at the beginning, with the first of the trucks bringing in the supplies, laying out and telling people where to put stuff, and then volunteers helping to construct the first set of structures. So we were kind of site supervisors, essentially people asking us, “What do we do with this?” “What do we do with that?” And once it was set up, then we took turns, it was one of us every day on that site, none of us spent the night there, but there was always one construction committee member to answer questions, there being a lot more work at the beginning that at the end.

LV So it ended up with something like 2,500 or 3,000 people living on site?

TL I think that was it.

LV I’m curious how much of the site is actually built out with that population? Was that beyond what was intended or was there a limit caused by the site for the number of people that assembled there?

TL No, in fact, there’s an as built drawing done by Wiebensen. There was room for more (Figure 6).

LV There was not a question of having reached the limits of your allocated site on the Mall?

TL No, if more people came, we could have extended the spine and the facilities – toilets, daycare centers, food and so on.

LV So it was moving linearly away from the Lincoln Memorial?

TL Yes, it started in the Lincoln Memorial and moved towards the Washington Monument.

LV And from the beginning, did you anticipate how long the settlement would last?

TL We had no idea. We assumed it would go on until the legislation passed. They were there to lobby: that was the intention. Groups during the day would go down to the Capitol and lobby. The whole point was aimed at passing legislation, for work, employment, gender equality etc.

LV Would it have been tied to the calendar of the congressional session lasting into the Summer?
I think we anticipated it would last through the Summer. I don’t think we ever thought that it was going to go beyond the Summer; the structures were not built for cold weather—the assumption was that there would be a legislative push.

And in terms of the expectations for seasonal viability, this was prepared to withstand Spring rains and the heat of a Washington Summer as you thought forward?

Yes. The soggy ground was not anticipated, obviously. But we had anticipated the rain, between the plywood and the plastic. The tent structures were pretty good; they were a natural kind of rain shelter. The problem was the ground, it became completely soggy, even though we started using some of the plywood to make boardwalks. By the end most people had left. It got pretty miserable.

Yes. So I guess my question is whether the role of the design had anything to do with the timing and longevity of the event. Was there anything about the low-lying conditions of the site, had they been able to maintain it at a higher level, that might have prolonged the occupation, or was the end of Resurrection City more of a political gesture?

No, there was nothing in the design. We could have gone easily through the Summer. It was clearly the politics, because by that time, King’s legacy was really vanishing in a sense, both because he was against the Vietnam war, and the increasing militancy of emerging young Black leaders. Among Topper’s friends, the group that was around Howard University and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was very much Black Power oriented. That was when the Black Panthers were emerging. Really charismatic people like H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael. Whereas the SCLC, they were really the last generation. Now if King had lived, who knows, he could have held it together. Nobody, not even the young hotheads, would challenge King; but when King was assassinated, everything changed. For example the chair of SCLC, [Ralph] Abernathy, didn’t live on the site but in a motel. That’s when Jesse Jackson emerged, because he lived on the site.

And he became mayor, correct?

That’s right for a short time, before he got exiled, because he was too successful. I remember his speeches. I said wow! He was an orator, young and vigorous, and had ideas.
LV Did this success made him in demand elsewhere, or is it that he threatened people?

TL No, they exiled him. It threatened Abernathy and the old leadership of SCLC and they sent him back to Chicago.

LV So we have the internal politics of SCLC, we have the radicalizing Black Power movement, and we have the Washington establishment, and we have the Spring rains and we have the soggy site. If we put all that together, why did the Resurrection City occupation end when it did and how it did?

TL Well the rains I think were the biggest factor. People had already started to leave because it just wasn’t livable. Families with kids left. What you’re left with is some of the criminal elements. They had been always there but they were very well behaved when the thing was going fine. But when things began to fall apart, it gave an excuse for the federal government to move in.

LV If it peaked at say 2,800 people, how many were left at the time the settlement was shut down?

TL I don’t know. A few hundred, I would say. Not many.

LV Was this really the last blow to a movement that was already under stress and in retreat by June when this happened?

TL Yes, because the country was already in turmoil, and there had been the riots after King’s assassination all over the country. That was still reverberating in the air. There have been many theories about the multiple failures of the movement; the conspiracy theory that once King went against the Vietnam War and organizing multi-racially against poverty, he had to be eliminated I have no idea. But Resurrection City certainly did mark the end of an era. The civil rights movement up to then had many successes. There was the Civil Rights Act in 1964, after Kennedy’s assassination. Lyndon Johnson knew that the Democrats would lose the South, once that was passed. The polarization in American society at that point was pretty stark. The white middle class, the silent majority of white ethnics, were pulling away from the Democrats. It accelerated the retreat from the cities—white flight had begun long before that. So all of these things were happening in the country, and King was ready to move on to a next step, which was, “OK, we won the racial issue, we now want to deal with poverty, and the Vietnam war is part of the problem—poor people are fighting that war; resources are being diverted.” And that was nipped because both the white left and the radical blacks just viewed it as not enough, that they had to do something more drastic. For the next several years, the movement moved to sporadic violence and anti-war organizing.

LV And so, was there any attempt to prolong the existence of Resurrection City by its leadership, or was the closing an expected event?

TL It wasn’t expected but it certainly marked definitively the end of that era.

LV But was there any kind of effort either through court action or political lobbying to stave off the forced shut-down of the encampment?

TL No, I think at that point the SCLC were ready to throw in the towel, anyway, and the people who were staying were the more radical younger people, determined to fight it out. It was the end of SCLC, the end of the Civil Rights Movement, in essence.

LV When you look back on this, do you think there was any role for the design and planning of physical space to support this kind of a movement?

TL I don’t think that—I think planning and design are adjuncts to political movements. Political movements are created by many people and as citizens, we participate. As planners and designers, we also can use our skills and expertise to further the goals of the cause.

LV And yet, if you think about the 1963 March on Washington, and the power of the setting for King’s speech that year, and the reinforcement of the axis leading to the Lincoln Memorial, and the symbolism of things associated with Lincoln, and the history of events from Marian Anderson onward to ‘63, it seems to me that physical design is much more than the backdrop for politics, that it really is something that gives politics much of its power.
Yes, but, the history of the Lincoln Memorial and the history of the Mall is Neoclassical Baroque, coming out of Counter Reformation Rome and Monarchial France, and it could be put to any number of uses. The setting was important—I don’t disagree with that. But it was the contrast of an encampment of poor people versus the expression of power that gave it resonance. Lincoln would cringe if he saw what they did to him. I mean, I love all this stuff, but on the other hand, if we think politically, the idea of putting him in a Greek temple, as an oversized statue on a pedestal, that’s like Sixtus V or Louis XIV.

At least they built it on a drained swamp.

[Laughs] Well, it was beautifully done, and it can be used by this event which is hugely symbolic for the unfinished business that Lincoln started. And the location for this is obviously very important, and I think that finding the right setting was a good thing. But I don’t want to overplay our work here. I think what SCLC wanted was to demonstrate that a bunch of poor people could run a place like this well. And they did, until the rains. And people came, a lot of people came on weekends, out into the Mall, and they would talk to the people at the site about the issues. For example, Tiananmen Square. It’s built at the gateway to the Forbidden City—the heart of Imperial China [transformed] into a monumental Communist Square to symbolize the overthrow of the emperors. In turn, the square becomes the locus of a popular uprising. It bears some further thinking, how spaces get appropriated for purposes which are not intended. It’s not that we were established designers working with Martin Luther King to create the ideal space for his project. When the situation arises in any country, people will find a prominent space, appropriate it, and use it to advance their cause—Tahrir Square and many others.

Well this has lots of parallels. It’s the Russian revolutionaries returning to take the Kremlin back as the backdrop for the Soviet Union and its base of operations. It’s the Post-British Empire, independent India, reusing the spaces of Edwin Lutyens for parading. In Australia, it’s the symbolic claim made on the Walter Burley Griffin land axis in Canberra by the aboriginal ‘tent embassy’, which is the only other long-term occupation of a capital city core space that I know. For more than 30 years, an eternal flame and a set of protest tents have been on the main axis or just off it, and aboriginals marked the pavement the words “Sacred Ground.” These struggles have been very important in the spaces where they have occurred...

I think appropriation is the right word.

...by taking and appropriating the place, the more that place had been associated with the strength of the regime that preceded the protest, the more its appropriation, even on a temporary basis, gains visibility as a credible threat.

And very resonant.

So looking back, what are you most proud about from your involvement in the Resurrection City venture?

Well that we did something that worked, served the movement that we supported. And we participated in something really meaningful. It was a privilege to be able to do something like that, and to work with the kind of people that we encountered. The spirit was fantastic, until it fizzled out. You don’t get many chances like that. It’s also the shortest and fastest planned, built and demolished project that I ever worked on, I think 60 days. Maybe 70 days. We had no time to think about it.

Is there advice that you would give to the people designing the next space of protest encampment, based on your experience with Resurrection City?

Be professional. That’s our responsibility, that’s what we can do best.
1 The official affiliations were James Goodell (then at Urban America), Kenneth Jadin (Department of Architecture, Howard University), Tunney Lee (architect and planner from Washington, DC), and John Wiebenson (School of Architecture, University of Maryland). See John Wiebenson, “Planning and Using Resurrection City,” in *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35:6 (1969), 405-411.


3 Marian Anderson (1897-1993) was an celebrated African-American singer. She performed an acclaimed open-air concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 after being refused permission to perform to an integrated audience in Constitution Hall.
ESCARAVOX: AGROSOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO GROW CROPS OF VOICE-EQUIPPED CITIZENS

ANDRÉS JAQUE ARCHITECTS OFFICE FOR POLITICAL INNOVATION

ESCARAVOX are assemblages of discarded rural infrastructures, reprogrammed as voice-giving public devices. In Madrid, contemporary art centers and other large cultural institutions tend to concentrate along the axis that joins Avenida de América with Legazpi Square, aligned with the city center. In contrast, small music and theater groups or poetry associations are for the most part evenly scattered throughout the capital’s extensive territory. Although individually these small groups culturally stimulate the local contexts in which their activities develop, considered as a collective they constitute the biggest cultural infrastructure in the city, making a large impact in terms of cultural promotion and debate activities.

Matadero Madrid is a former slaughterhouse that has been turned into a cultural institution that describes itself as a “public space for contemporary culture, with views on the river.” The aim of our project is to endow it with the necessary material devices and institutional protocols to prompt a connection between the aforementioned models of intervention in the cultural field, activating their potential as a broader collective network. To achieve this, the scheme proposes equipping the open spaces of the old abattoir with varied types of large-span mobile structures with sound-amplifying systems, stage lighting, and audiovisual projection systems, so that in combination with sliding stands, they may serve as auxiliary structures for public performances. The use of these facilities is organized following the conventions of the local municipal tennis courts, which are booked by the hour. The structure’s materials are based on the idea of an odd assemblage of inexpensive elements: irrigation systems, polythene fabric from the greenhouses of the Spanish province of Almería, or cheap plastic chairs. A composite of ready mades, using existing technologies in ways different from their original intent. It is a technological reappropriation process, which the office relates to the possibility of queer uses of available systems.
Figures 1-3 ESCARAVOX at Matadero Madrid.
Figures 4-6 ESCARAVOX at Matadero Madrid.
TEAM
Project Ruggero Agnolutto (Project leader), Fernando Arocha, Ángela Bailén, Almudena Basabe, Elisa Bua, Álvaro Carrillo, Catalina Corredor, Roberto González García, Michal Just, Jorge López Conde, Marco Marcelletti, Paola Pardo, Khristian Serena, Patrycja Stal, Dagmar Stéeeova, Silvie Talackova.
Structure BOMA
Equipment Juan Carlos Lafuente, Álvaro Zamora
Photographs Miguel de Guzmán
Sociological Research Silvia Rodríguez
Video Michal Just
Client Matadero Madrid

Figure 7 ESCARAVOX Lux, plan and elevations.
Figure 8 ESCARAVOX Lux, one-point perspective.
Aula Abierta Sevilla was initiated in the first week of March 2012 with an auto-construction workshop organized by the collective LaMatraka (http://www.lamatraka.es), with the help of several collectives including ElGatoconMoscas, La Jarapa, El cuarteto Maravilla, ConceptuArte, Straddle3, and many more friends from different countries. The project is inscribed into an expanded project called “Espacio Artístico - La Carpa” (Artistic Space – The Tent), which is the headquarters of the Varuma Theater and the future Circus School of Andalucía. The expanded project is comprised of structures and facilities which have all been donated, recycled, or reused from previous experiences, including an “arachnid office” and a developing room in collaboration with the collective La Jarapa. The development of this project in a peripheral neighborhood of Seville and the collaboration with several collectives is part of a larger strategy to decentralize cultural production. The multi-use classroom will be open to collectives in need of a space to meet, rehearse, or teach as long as they have social or cultural aims.

Although the current administration has not approved the permits, they require the project to be active in order to renew the lease of the lot. Thus we have chosen to start construction and operation, making the current construction technically illegal. Aula Abierta Sevilla has been supported through a variety of means—from agreements to lease out the space, material donations, volunteer construction, a barter system, and the “Goteo” crowdfunding social network. Through these multiple funding modes, the project articulates a way in which we are co-producing an open space, independent from government-managed and funded cultural works. We aim to produce another type of politics. In other words, as long as the state does not expand citizen rights and improve the legal system, we have found our own way to function by means of collectively produced, inhabitable interventions. Each action demands greater rights for our citizens, yet the question remains: what must a group of citizens do to obtain legal rights for publicly-driven re-use of abandoned and obsolete buildings?
Figures 1-2  *Aula Abierta Sevilla, Seville* 2012, construction process.

**Figure 3** *Espacio Artístico – La Carpa.*
Figure 4 Aula Abierta Sevilla, Seville 2012, construction process.

Figures 5-6 Aula Abierta Sevilla, Seville 2012.
**Figure 7** Developing Room, construction process 11 October 2012.

**Figures 8-9** Developing Room, La Jarapa Office and Photography Lab.
DISOBEDIENCE: AN ONGOING VIDEO ARCHIVE
NOMEDA URBONAS AND GEDIMINAS URBONAS

The Disobedience Archive brings together a series of practices and forms of individual self-representation just as they are finding the key to their strength in an alliance of art and activism: a transformation in the languages that society produces as political subject and as media object. What matters in Disobedience is not so much an ‘alliance’ between activist demands and artistic practices in order to achieve common goals: it is the emergence of a common space or a common base. This space is not clearly defined, thus making it impossible to draw a precise line between forces and signs, between language and labor, between intellectual production and political action. It functions through a display of the archive format, in which all the materials on display share the same level of importance—without hierarchies and without exhibiting any preordained set of institutional rules. It is up to the public to choose and to organize their vision of the available material, turning the archive into a toolkit ready for use.

The Disobedience Archive has been organized and exhibited in many different venues across the world since 2005. In the installation at the lobby of the Media Lab Complex at MIT, the Disobedience Archive expanded to include cases of political and artistic action that have manifested in the geographic and historical terrain of Boston. In addition, new student works that critically interrogate concepts of disobedience were exhibited in conversation with the pre-existing body of works that comprised the archive. Here, the archive itself took the form of a garden “corridor” arranged on an axis that disrupted the traditional logic of the existing space and made an allusion to spatial and urban politics, from community gardens to self-reliant tent cities, that have characterized many instances of activism in the Boston area.

Boston chapter curators Nomeda Urbonas and Gediminas Urbonas with Marco Scotini
Assistant curator Andris Brinkmanis
Display system Urbonas Studio in collaboration with Julian Bonder
Exhibition team Anna Caterina Bleuler, Sung Woo Jang, Anastasia Yakovleva, Catherine McMahon, Slobodon Radoman

Participants The Disobedience Archive research and exhibition are produced in collaboration with students from the ACT courses Art, Architecture and Urbanism in Dialogue, and Introduction to Networked Cultures and Participatory Media: Alex Auriema, Sofia Berinstein, Giacomo Castagnola, Sumona Chakravarty, Joan Chen, Caleb Benjamin Harper, Sung Woo Jang, Ali Khalid Qureshi, Slobodon Radoman, Summer Stephanie Sutton, Hailong Wu.

Installation MDF display system, TV monitors, audio, DVD, printed matter, posters, props, microplants, aluminium frames, various dimensions. Media Lab, MIT, Cambridge MA, December 9, 2011 – April 15.

http://disobedience.mit.edu
Figure 1 Disobedience Archive: Boston Chapter. Media Lab, MIT, Cambridge MA, 2011-2012.
Opposite

Figure 2 Tent City 1968 Boston MA.

Figure 3 An Interview: Mel King, Video still, DVD 57 min.

Figure 4 MIT Protest Poster from the MIT Museum General Collection, 1969-1971.

Figure 5 Screening of unedited “November Actions” by Richard Leacock with a talk by Glorianna Davenport at the opening panel of Disobedience: An Ongoing Video Archive. Boston Chapter, ACT Cube, MIT 2011.

Figure 6 An Interview: Paul E. Summit on Harvard Strike 1969, Video still, DVD 32 min., 2011.

Figure 7 Occupy Boston 2011, Boston, MA.

Figure 8 Occupy Harvard 2011, Cambridge MA.

Left

Figure 9 Juliet Kepes Stone: BUG: Boston Urban Gardens. Video still from slide show on DVD 42 min.

Figure 10 Bus Tour: Community Gardens in Boston 2012, a component of the thesis project of Scott Berzofsky (SMACT 2012) Disobedience Archive: Boston Chapter.


This exhibition was possible through the support of the Office of the Dean at MIT SA+P, Council for the Arts at MIT, the Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT), and NABA – Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milano.
In 2009, we made a movie called *The Yes Men Fix the World*. It got a lot of attention and changed things for us overnight. Activists and organizations swarmed us with requests to learn our secrets, and our network of media-hijacking troublemakers exploded. So we started the Yes Lab, a system for training activists and organizations to use powerful news-making tactics to support crucial campaigns.

Now we’re working on a new film—*The Yes Men Are Revolting*—which will inspire audiences to take action even more than our last movie did. That’s because this one focuses on how lots of people working together, doing whatever they can, makes a serious difference—and how anyone can get involved in the movement. And now, to give our justice-hungry audience some sharper teeth, we’re hatching our most ambitious plot yet: a human-powered online platform that will massively extend the Yes Lab’s reach, and give creative activism a shot in the arm—an online organizing space for offline action.

As corporations melt glaciers of money into the development of technology that benefits their business and political interests, it is more important than ever that activists seize on technology’s potential to enable social change. After all, direct action is a critical part of any democracy, and to counter the influence of money in politics we need everyone to get active. The Yes Lab online network will build on the successes—and learn from the shortcomings—of other activist web platforms to produce on-the-ground direct action.

Our huge network of supporters and collaborating organizations, effective training systems, and the trust we have developed with the activist community puts us in a unique position to develop this powerful new tool and make it work.

In 2013, as we release *The Yes Men Are Revolting* and the Yes Lab, we hope to be revolting alongside lots of new and seasoned activists—including you!

http://www.yeslab.org
The 1857 mutiny-rebellion in India coincided with the advent of commercial photography; its practitioners documented the event and circulated its images in the colonial print and picture market. The coincidence meant that the uprising played an early role in the shifting norms in image making brought about by new camera and plate technology. Captured in the March or April of 1858, Felice Beato’s “Interior of Sikanderbagh” (Figure 1) documents one of the defining encounters in the uprising of 1857 that precipitated the transfer of the administrative responsibility of the colonial territories in India from the East India Company to the British Monarchy. The picture documents a destroyed part of a residential complex foregrounded by human fragments, its composition held together by the cursory presence of four men and a horse. In doing so, the exposure captures the collaborative forces of monopoly capital, military incursions, and technological changes on the surface of the image—an image which then circulated around empire in its commodity form. In this article, I analyze the picture formally in order to map its key elements—the human fragments and the ruined building—onto the context of the forces that rendered the photograph meaningful.

The events of 1857 are hard to summarize into the singular theme of a mutiny or a rebellion. They consisted of a series of military mutinies and civilian uprisings that threatened the East India Company’s grasp of the territories under its command. The Company managed its Indian assets with its British army, whose swollen lower ranks were populated by native sepoys. These low-ranking foot soldiers were socially and economically discontented; they remained segregated, were summarily paid less than similarly ranked British soldiers, and faced constant proselytization and the threat of losing caste. Thus, when rumors spread that the cartridges for the new Enfield rifles on their way up from Calcutta were greased with pig and cow fat both Hindus and Muslims were angered. This attempted somatic pollution evidenced to them the insidious conspiracy to cause their loss of caste, facilitating their conversion to Christianity. A series of quickly controlled, minor rebellious incidents occurred, but the decisive insubordination was that of the Meerut-based cavalry which mutinied on May 10, 1857; the sepoys then marched to Delhi, spreading word of the revolt as they moved along. The worst months for the British armed effort were June and July, with cities like Lucknow and Cawnpore under rebel control, and although British
fortunes improved in August and more so by the end of the year, their counter insurgency continued for many more months. The insurrection was declared under control in July 1858, although guerilla fighting continued in some pockets across the subcontinent. Before the end of the year Queen Victoria issued a proclamation formally announcing the sepoy rebellion as over.2

The specific event referenced in this photograph is the denouement of the infamous siege of Lucknow that lasted six months. By June 1857, the mutinying sepoys blockaded the city from the east, forcing fleeing Britons to retreat into their residency, which was defended by the remaining loyalist troops. Escape was impossible, as rebel groups had also taken over the northern city of Cawnpore, trapping the party in Lucknow. A relief force that managed to break into the city in September with supplies further found itself under siege when rebel numbers swelled around the city. Finally, in November, Sir Colin Campbell made his first (and successful) attack on Lucknow from the east, encountering in his path Sikanderbagh, whose interior we see in the image.1 A bitter battle ensued, with 2,000 rebels killed upon clashing with the Ninety-third Highlanders and Fourth Punjab Regiment, after which the group at the residency was rescued. The city was not taken back until the following March when Beato, finally able to access a now desolate and destroyed Lucknow, was able to make the picture.

The photo was unusual; unlike other images in Beato’s oeuvre, ‘Sikanderbagh’ broke some of the guidelines of picturesque composition that early war photography tended toward. The eighteenth-century picturesque was simultaneously a way of looking, a technique of painting, an idea of nature, a trained aesthetic taste, and many other arbitrary, but particular rules governing the relationship between aesthetics and nature. The ruin remained an important element in these compositions. Colonial documenters, in their imperial excesses, employed the style in their records of the colony, transforming it into its imperial avatar. By the nineteenth century a new ‘colonial picturesque’ dominated the British print market, compelling painters in England to reinvent the mode in a nationalist form, as a “reenchantment of the domestic rural landscape,” which recuperated the British countryside for the local market.4 The colonial picturesque however had developed along another trajectory; it invoked the colony as virgin territory and an untapped expanse of “ruggedness, turbulence and primeval powers of nature,” awaiting imperial extraction.5 One of the earliest purveyors of its imperial and archeological gaze were the uncle and nephew team Thomas and William Daniell, who, in 1789, embarked on a cross-country voyage to draw ancient architectural ruins in the countryside, catering to the market’s demand for images of India. The picturesque also shaped the archeological survey drawings of James Fergusson, made during his many travels across the territory between 1835 and 1842.6 Borrowing the figure of the ruin, Beato’s urban images shunned a rugged and primeval nature, in favor of a different exercise of power: the violence of war. This demanded a deviation from earlier aesthetic codes: The photo-
Figure 1 Felice Beato, Sikander Bagh, Lucknow, Albumen Print, photographed ca. March or April 1858.
graph omitted references to nature and infinity, eschewing the horizon and instead of an unfolding expanse, it ‘contained’ the entire scene.7

War photography, a commercial enterprise—nascent and having few conventions of its own—borrowed from its predecessor, picturesque image-making, to compel the narrative of a distant, yet accessible territory. However, compared to painting, war photography was privileged; by offering documentary exactitude it made the violence of war more palpable, more present. While archeological drawings and imagery of the colony exploited the fantasy of an infinite imperial expanse, the very idea that drove colonial territorial expansion, war photography came with the promise of representing imperial action, the action that executed the task. Beato’s picture in particular, very directly, connotes imperial strength: the barely porous, battered structure fills the frame of the photo almost completely. Within this tightly confined composition, we see the bodies from the same angle the guns saw them. Lost to the modern sensibility is that Victorian image-making never showed the dead, let alone their own dead.8 This photograph is purportedly one of the earliest to document corpses in war imagery.9

Beato’s trade in photographs depended on the economy of the circulation of pictures of far-away British territories in the metropole. He usually funded his own trips, accompanying military campaigns in colonial locations, to then return and organize public displays and exhibitions where he would sell his images to his patrons. This entrepreneurial structure took him to Crimea, as an assistant to James Robertson, and later, independently, to India, China, Japan, and eventually Burma, where he started a mail-order business selling his photographs.10 Beato was one of the archetypal subjects of empire, the small-scale commercial artist in the profession of documenting and circulating unofficial images of the colony. No doubt, some of his patrons were stockholders and creditors of the government and of the East India Company, who, like the infamous imperial apologist James Mill, never visited the territory in which they had invested. These were the creditors and stockholders to whom the Company was answerable and for whose profits the cannibalistic company provoked military confrontations in the pursuit of colonial territory (the most recent was the annexation of Awadh), draining both its primary supports: British state funds and Nawabi wealth.11 After 1857, the state refused to support the military pursuits of the company whose authority now came under question. The British government spent the astronomical sum of £50 million to quell the mutiny-revolt; this addition to the British public debt mandated that the Indian territories be brought under the crown so that they could be taxed to recompense the new administration.

Beato departed from England upon the news of the uncertain, yet escalating conflict in India. He arrived in Calcutta amid continuing violence, but the enemy still controlled key cities, and he only gained access to Lucknow after it was deserted, empty, and ghostly.12 The allure of photography, especially war photography, is that it
makes present and tangible events that are distant and unpredictable, for which the photographer is required to be present, and possess a certain amount of luck: to be in the right place at the right time. The photographer’s implied presence at the scene of battle makes the violence in his photograph palpable. Beato, unfortunately, could not be in the right place at the right time and for reasons we cannot completely know, he chose to stage parts of his images of the city. Some causality for ‘staging’ photographs, that is, having people ‘pose’ for the shot, can be attributed to the technology of photography itself. Beato used the wet plate collodion process introduced in the 1850s. The wet plate consisted of a glass sheet coated in light-sensitive silver halides and gelatin. The required exposure time was around fifteen seconds, registered in the swing of the horse’s tail, and the plate had to be developed within ten minutes of its exposure, while it was still wet. This necessitated a darkroom on the scene of every shoot, subtended within which is the invisible labor of the porters carrying his equipment across war-torn landscapes. This technological constraint resulted in the central conflict of war photography: How do you represent action when you cannot capture movement? In this sense, war photography was even further removed from war scenes than painting, which could approximate movement. To compensate, photographers worked with a set of codes that indexed previously actualized bodies. These codes, such as cannonballs or debris, were surrogates for people, witnesses to motion.13 The photograph in all its successes or attempts at making the colony present in the metropole, always already came too late after the event.

In this image, which overstates military strength, Beato staged the most compelling detail. He arranged the human remains in the foreground of the image for the photograph. There are various hypotheses for how the photographer acquired the skeletal fragments; perhaps they were piled up inside the structure, and he borrowed them briefly before they were buried. Alternately, since the corpses of the rebels hardly had sufficient time after the massacre to decompose and leave behind clean, white bones, they were likely exhumed from a nearby graveyard.14 Regardless, it is certain that Beato arranged his frame, using the fragments of rebel bodies to reanimate the corpse of the building with the crime it had witnessed.15 This is perhaps a moment of exchange: the subjects of the suppression indexed by this image have been replaced in the image itself. They have been substituted with what we could call accidental witnesses to the photo. Thus, we can think of the act of ‘staging’ a photograph as replicating the scene of action, just after the act itself has transpired. It entailed the arrangement of props to create a narrative that simultaneously concealed and revealed elements of the plot. The theatricality compels us to ask, what reason deserved this labor of staging, and what operation allowed these fragments their fungibility? What reanimated them with meaning that they did not previously possess?

I would argue that the economy of photography, although dependent on an authentic subject, dislodges the visual and corporeal body of its signified meaning. The object then, like a figure of rhetoric, evacuated of its connotation, is remade as a
floating signifier—a trope. This, I argue, is precisely the operation that was performed on the bodies in the photo. We do not know to whom they belong, and from which graves they were unearthed, but text and context anchors them to new owners: the sepoys. Perhaps Beato, a commercial photographer, intuitively understood this malleable relationship between the signifier and its signified. Perhaps this is why he exhibited little dilemma in exhuming and rearranging clean, white bones and repositioning not just their physical relation to each other, but their signification, by virtue of juxtaposition. While the bodies, the accidental subjects of the imperial gaze, remain unreliable witnesses of the events they purport to refer to, the photograph remains dependent on the actual event. Photography’s privileged status as a quasi-legal document gives this image its power, allowing it to oscillate between exactitude and truth, between precision and authenticity.

But while one half of the photograph fails as a precisely indexical system of signifiers, since the bones reference something that they have no connection to, the other half of the photo, the ruin with its debris does not fail in the same way. The wrecked building fills the frame of the image, containing and constraining it, which is an analog for the tactic used on the day of the encounter. Having seized the bagh and blockaded the entrance to the city to maintain control of it, the rebels were taken by surprise when Sir Colin Campbell’s attack came from the outside. The offensive walled-in the mutineers, who were slaughtered on exiting the building. Pockmarked with ammunition, the building—unlike the bodies—actually witnessed the events of the confrontation. Thus, surprisingly, or even accidentally, Beato’s staged image is true, or at least analogous, to the narrative of the event it hopes to portray. The ruin of the building and the human fragments amid debris are set up as compositional reflections of one another, within which the viewer, like the sepoy, is trapped, with no respite outside the system. Not only did the structure confine the sepoys, its representation now constrains the viewer from the relief of infinity usually offered in images of picturesque ruins. In fact, if there is any hint of continuity available in this frame, it is of the endless field of corpses that possibly spreads out of the foreground, under the feet of the viewer. Perhaps this very gesture of restriction disengages the urban, man-made ruin of Sikanderbagh from the natural, time-ravaged one, and its imperial, archeological cousin.

The figure of the ruin in the English landscape came to signify the power of nature over man’s creations, in response to the hubris of the industrial revolution. Only time and weather could soften the harsh geometric lines of architecture, until, reduced to indistinguishable rubble, the original form was no longer discernable. The ruin in picturesque painting and landscape gardens acted as an object that threw its surrounding countryside into relief. By exhibiting its powerlessness, the ruin reaffirmed the infinite strength of the natural. Arguably, the colonial/imperial ruin did not connote the same thing. Rather, the crumbling stones symbolized the decay of some glorious but decadent and failed empire consumed by wilderness. In contrast, Sikan-
Derbagh connotes neither of the two signifieds, denying ‘nature’ completely. David Gissen has argued that the description of damaged architecture shifted from the use of the word rubble to the use of debris sometime in the early eighteenth century. The rise of the word debris coincides with the large-scale use of gunpowder employed to destroy buildings and cities that reached its zenith with World War Two and the annihilating threat of the Cold War.

Debris is arguably an accurate description for this urban ruin. The building itself was the product of what Rosie Llewelyn-Jones has called “a fatal friendship” between the wealthy Nawabs and the monopolistic East India Company. Built by the last Nawab in a collaborative mood, Sikanderbagh’s arabesque decorated tympanum provided a fitting backdrop for the collusion of the various moneyed elite, through whom monopoly capital found its way into the continent. Capital’s ability to impart exchange value, making any objects it acquires fungible, is thrown into relief by the human fragments that have already undergone substitution. Debris itself is interchangeable: anywhere it looks the same. The photograph, tangling together hybrid architecture, indistinguishable debris, and switched human fragments, is a veritable composition of a modern ruin.

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1 “Sepoy” is an anglicized version of ‘sipahi,’ which in urdu means foot-soldier and in the Company’s garrisons, it referred to a native soldier.
3 Lucknow, the capital of the kingdom of Awadh (Oudh), was founded in 1775 by Nawab Asaf ud Daula on the banks of the river Gomti. The Company had gained a toehold in the kingdom in 1764 when the third Nawab had lost the battle of Buxar. In Lucknow, the British set up a permanent resident, and after that, an entire residency, which was supported by the very wealthy Nawabs. The Company constantly took loans from the Nawab, which were soon converted to donations. Wajid Ali Shah constructed many things one of which was Sikanderbagh (this literally means Sikander’s garden). A bagh was usually a residential complex and Sikanderbagh was the summerhouse of one of the last Nawab’s wives. Bannali Tandon describes it as a typical Indo-European essay. Some elements had an English neoclassical theme, while others were of the free composite order, best typified by the arabesque-covered tympanum that we see in Beato’s photo. See Bannali Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow and Oudh 1722-1856: Its Evolution in an Aesthetic and Social Context (Cambridge: Zophorus, 2008), 269.
8 Arguably, it is only the knowledge of this sensibility that confirms the identity of the skeletal fragments as being of Indian bodies, and not British ones.
11 The annexation of Awadh (Oudh) formally took place on 7 February 1856, when the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was forced to
sign his kingdom over to the East India Company on the pretext of the decadent rulers, and mistreated subjects. The Nawab, who had long supported the residency and considered the Company his ally, was not ready for armed battle. Within five weeks, he and his mother left for Calcutta where the Queen mother set sail to England to discuss the situation with the Queen on equal terms. The departure of the Nawab, the familiar seat of power, left a vacuum in Lucknow and caused worry to its inhabitants, a situation that played a role in supporting the mutiny. See Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India*, 98-100.

12 Ebrahim Alkazi, writing about Beato’s eight-image panorama of Lucknow, emphasizes the emptiness of the city to which he was witness. Alkazi writes, “There is not a single human being stirring: the only signs of life are garments hanging limply from a clothes line and a few disconsolate white cows sheltering from the blistering midday sun. The devastations, large scale and brutal, has caused the population to flee in terror.” Ebrahim Alkazi, in *Lucknow: City of Illusion*, ed. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones (New York: Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2006), 89.


14 Pinney makes a case for the piles of bodies being uncovered and arranged for the photo, “As John Fraser has documented, Beato did not arrive in Lucknow until probably March 1858, four or perhaps five months after its capture. So how was it that so long after the event the skeletons of rebels were so evident, so conveniently acting out the ghostly tragedy of the Sikanderbagh? Writing in 1893, Sir George Campbell would recall that ‘There was a first rate photographer in attendance taking all the scenes [and] many of the scenes were really very striking. One horrible one was the Shah of Najaf’ [Fraser assumes that this is a misremembering of Sikanderbagh]. The great pile of bodies had been decently covered over before the photographer could take them, but he insisted on having them uncovered to be photographed before they were finally disposed of.’ For a public desiring of the events themselves this was of little consequence. Photography was, after all, supposed to preserve the very instant shock of contact.” 128-130. Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (London: British Library, 2008).

15 Chaudhary argues that the bodies were exhumed, “Not content with mere architectural ruins, Beato ordered full exhumation of the only half-buried corpses and posed them in the courtyard of Sikanderbagh, searching as he was yet again for the immediacy and truth of battle, the very instant of death.” 69. Zahid Chaudhary “Phantasmagoric Aesthetics: Colonial Violence and the Management of Perception,” *Cultural Critique* 59 (2005), 63-119.


In a letter to a close friend dated April 1922 Le Corbusier announced that he was to publish his first major book, *Architecture et révolution*, which would collect “a set of articles from L’EN.”1—*L’Esprit nouveau*, the revue jointly edited by him and painter Amédée Ozenfant, which ran from 1920 to 1925.2 A year later, Le Corbusier sketched a book cover design featuring “LE CORBUSIER - SAUGNIER,” the pseudonymic compound of Pierre Jeanneret and Ozenfant, above a square-framed single-point perspective of a square tunnel vanishing toward the horizon. Occupying the lower half of the frame was the book’s provisional title in large handwritten capital letters, *ARCHITECTURE OU RÉVOLUTION*, each word on a separate line, the “ou” a laconic inflection of Paul Laffitte’s proposed title, *effected by* Le Corbusier.3 Laffitte was one of two publishers Le Corbusier was courting between 1921 and 1922.4 An advertisement for the book, with the title finally settled upon, *Vers une architecture*,5 was solicited for *L’Esprit nouveau* number 18. This was the original title conceived with Ozenfant, and had in fact already appeared in two earlier announcements.6

“Architecture ou révolution” was retained as the name of the book’s crucial and final chapter—the culmination of six chapters extracted from essays in *L’Esprit nouveau*. This chapter contained the most quoted passage in *Vers une architecture*, used by numerous scholars to adduce Le Corbusier’s political sentiment in 1923 to the extent of becoming axiomatic of his early political thought.7 Interestingly, it is the only chapter that was not published in *L’Esprit nouveau*, owing to a hiatus in the journal’s production from June 1922 to November 1923.8 An agitprop pamphlet was produced in 1922, after *L’Esprit nouveau* 11-12, advertising an imminent issue “Architecture ou révolution” with the famous warning: “the housing crisis will lead to the revolution. Worry about housing.”9

I would like to propose that it was Le Corbusier himself who changed the earlier title to *Architecture ou révolution*, in 1922, at the precise moment Le Corbusier-Saugnier’s selfsame rubric for the forthcoming issue of *L’Esprit nouveau* materialized, and which was, in turn, reserved for the final chapter of his book. Laffitte suggested the “et” in what was a partial neutralization of the architect’s theoretical intent. Le Corbusier
acquiesced to the edit and soon after—and behind Laffitte’s back—submitted a draft manuscript with Laffitte’s version of the title to Besson. However, by January 1923, Le Corbusier had reverted to his original book title of 1918, *Vers une architecture*, as per the advertisement in *L’Esprit nouveau*. This history of names is neither pedantic nor trivial if we consider the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of the word *révolution*. Despite—or in spite of—the return to *Vers une architecture* in 1923, that same year, Le Corbusier’s cover design curiously bears the title *Architecture ou révolution*, from which we can deduce that the modern architect held on to *la révolution* as the leitmotif of his project until the end. The book ends with the said remark:

*Society violently desires one thing that it will obtain or that it will not. Everything lies in that; everything will depend on the effort made and the attention paid to these alarming symptoms.*

*Architecture or revolution.*

*Revolution can be avoided.*

Historians have interpreted this passage hence: Le Corbusier believed modern architecture (mass housing and the “engineer’s aesthetic”) was the prevention of social unrest, a translation consistent with the dominant reception of Le Corbusier’s early philosophy as a Saint Simonian social-utopianism, whose paradigm is the *Ville Contemporaine* with its technocratic associations. Following Le Corbusier’s early association with the twenties’ *Redressement Français*, there exists a notion of a radical shift in Le Corbusier’s philosophy by the forties, when he joined the Vichy regime. This is based on the facts that in the 1930s Le Corbusier was associated with Georges Valois and Hubert Lagardelle, that he was the editor of the syndicalist journal *Prélude*, that he delivered a lecture in Rome in 1934 (invited by Mussolini), and most importantly that he collaborated with Vichy in the 1940s. Yet, despite Le Corbusier’s late authoritarian activities and affiliation, the architect’s postwar works such as the *Unité d’Habitation*, are still often paralleled with the *Phalanstère* and ideal city of Charles Fourier as industrial socialist models of the city. The conception of modernism as a utopian project of social redemption endures in no small part because of this historical reading of Le Corbusier’s refrain *Architecture ou révolution* in 1923. This is the reading I will contest in this essay.

It is widely known the young architect condemned the French Revolution of 1789, which he felt was responsible for the decline of French art. Yet Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris was also proud of the revolutionary history of his ancestry, as per the account he provided of his grandfather’s participation in the 1831 and 1848 revolutions in *Crusade or the Twilight of the Academies*. Le Corbusier must have known that *L’Esprit nouveau* was the title of a book on politics in 1875 by Quinet, an intellectual and rioter in the very 1848 revolution. Furthermore, in 1923 Le Corbusier reproduced the first principle of the French Revolution in Enlightenment France.
Figure 1 Le Corbusier, *Architecture ou révolution*, sketch for cover design.
at the end of the eighteenth century: he cast himself as a revolutionary intellectual, entitled to property. I propose the locution “Architecture ou révolution” is neither against social revolution nor is it socialist credo per se: “Architecture or Revolution” is a heuristic device that transcends the received socialist dialectical reading of Le Corbusier’s argument, architecture/revolution. The architect’s contended and self-proclaimed “politics” and “beliefs” should be considered historical projections that converge on the Realpolitik of twentieth-century thought between the two wars, a politico-conceptual groundswell he cannot have avoided.

For in 1923 there was a real revolution unfolding before Le Corbusier’s eyes: the Fascist revolution of Benito Mussolini. The international surge of fascism and authoritarian philosophy in the beginning of the twentieth century forms prima facie the atmosphere and lining of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant’s literary project (even if the architect declared himself to be a socialist in 1919, and then a conservative in 1920). Less than a year before Vers une architecture was published, the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF) rose to power. Le Corbusier noted in his memoirs: “1922 Fascist march on Rome. Mussolini takes power in Italy”—and he was deeply moved. Mussolini had successfully deployed the fanatical Squadristi (the Blackshirts) to extinguish Italy’s socialist movement as early as 1920, the year L’Esprit nouveau debuted. Ten years later, Le Corbusier would describe the Exhibition for the anniversary of the March on Rome as “the prodigious Rome-Exhibition of the Revolution.” This is the revolution intended by Le Corbusier, a violent reversal by an authority—not the proletarian revolution that he denounced. For him, Italian Fascism was revolutionary in the true sense of a radical (structural) change in power that takes place at lightning speed. If Italy was late to adopt modern architecture, compared with France and Germany, in the making of authoritarian politics and history, Italy was precocious.

It is didactic in this regard that unlike Italy, France did not experience massive popular support for fascism—notwithstanding the Vichy collaboration, which was not strictly “conservative” but preserved many of the progressive social programs of the Front Populaire, and further, a spectrum of fascistic groups in 1920s-1930s France. Instead, France provided the intellectual antecedents for fascism prior to the 1920s, in earlier movements such as the far-right monarchist Action Française, founded in 1898 during the Dreyfus affair; in Emile Zola’s publication J’Accuse and the nationalist response to the latter in figures such as anti-Semite Maurice Barres; and even the Jacobinism of the French Revolution (1789-1799). As is well known, modern fascist political philosophy first manifested in France in the fin de siècle movement of the 1880s, whose proponents were a mixture of Italian and French intellectual figures such as the French revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel. By 1909 Sorel and his followers had moved from the radical left to the right, and Sorelianism came to be seen as the precursor to twentieth-century fascism. Even while fascism in France failed to captivate the masses it formed the intellectual framework and inspi-
ration for Mussolini, who would later acknowledge his debt to Sorel in “The Doctrine of Fascism.”

Under these conditions, *L’Esprit nouveau* was coolly received, with its socialist urbanism and aspirations of land reformation. All the while Le Corbusier yearned for “a Napoleon I,” a “Louis XIV,” or a Haussmann—and lamented that France had no Mussolini or Hitler. Such facts have been produced as evidence of a contradiction in Le Corbusier’s political position—an argument overturned by Paul Venable Turner’s 1971 Harvard dissertation, which reveals Le Corbusier’s unwavering thought. Despite Turner’s scholarship, historians have vacillated between this theory of a shift in the architect’s thought (from the ‘Left’ to the ‘Right’), and a second reading of his ideological position as “contradictory,” “ambivalent” or “elusive.” Yet, this alleged contradiction lies outside Le Corbusier, and rests instead within the very gestation of fascism in France and Italy via the split within the revolutionary Left (the Socialist Parties in each country). The militant revolutionaries and fascists are linked prior to twentieth-century politics through a bitter intellectual battle that traces back to the birth of authoritarian thought. For Sorel and the French anarcho-syndicalists, violent revolution was a noble act carried out by both the proletariats and capitalists in order to intensify and not eliminate class warfare. Violence and war, the mythic catalyst for production, was the first tenet of Sorelianism.

Le Corbusier’s sentiment, therefore seen through Sorel’s eyes—“Society is filled with a violent desire for something which it may obtain, or may not. Everything lies in that. Everything depends on the effort made and the attention paid to these alarming symptoms. Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided”—does not evoke a socialist utopian revolution but its unconscious ideological shadow. Namely, that society has a desire for violence at the dawning of Fascism in 1923, a problem that would become the precise object of Wilhelm Reich’s study *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (*The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, later banned by the Nazis). Reich argued that it was not because people were stupid that they submitted to fascism, rather they desired it. The desire for violence, *which it may or may not obtain*, is manifestly erotic: the perversion seeks satisfaction through violent force, on the one hand, and derives pleasure in desire without gratification, on the other (Sorel’s war is an end in itself). In short, it speaks Walter Benjamin’s warning about the aestheticization of violence. Le Corbusier was nascently aware that desiring fascism is a neurosis—even while he called it “revolution”—and implored us to observe its “alarming symptoms.”

In 1925, the Duce announced his five-year plan to restore Rome to its original condition under Augustus. True to plan, he ordered the decimation of all urban fabric surrounding the great Roman monuments:
In five years Rome will appear beautiful to everyone in the world; vast, ordered and powerful as it was under Augustus. You will liberate the trunk of the great oak from everything that encumbers it. You will open up the areas around the theater of Marcellus, the Pantheon, and the Campidoglio; everything that was created during the centuries of decadence must disappear. In five years one must be able to see the Pantheon from the Piazza Colonna. You will also free the majestic temples of Christian Rome from their parasitical constructions. The millennial monuments of our history must stand isolated and majestic.\textsuperscript{29}

Le Corbusier shared Mussolini’s image of Rome of “decay” and “decadence,” meaning cluttered with post-Roman urban fabric.\textsuperscript{30} The architect had a similarly austere urban vision for Paris. Yet there is another resemblance between Mussolini’s aestheticization of Rome and the architect’s historical rendering in Vers une architecture, where Le Corbusier did not merely valorize Greece and Rome, and the age of classical antiquity: the Parthenon, Paestum, and Hadrian’s Villa, which are the formal quintessence of the “new spirit.” He graphically “isolated” and “purified” ancient monuments in the book, by deleting surrounding structures and architectural elements from the original photographs that were visual obstructions to the “majestic” formal concept of each building. In the pulpit of Santa Maria in Cosmedin he eliminated columns and blackened the windows.\textsuperscript{31} Once “freed,” the postcard images were serialized on the page, resembling Mussolini’s stark serialized vision of Rome. Just as Mussolini called the Pantheon and Piazza Colonna to stand in a strict visual line, “Leçon de Rome” begins with the famously austere line up of monuments: the Pyramid of Cestius 12 BCE, the Colosseum 80 CE, Arch of Constantine 12 CE, that renders each building beautiful, large, and alone in what is fundamentally revisionist historiography.\textsuperscript{32}

In another sequence Notre Dame Cathedral, the Arc de Triomphe, Place de l’Opéra, and Saint-Jacques church tower are isolated and serialized over a black silhouette of “The Cunarder Aquitania” ship. France, here, is suspended in Le Corbusier’s beloved méditerranée—and Italy becomes the birthplace, the primordial sea, of modern architecture.

For “The Lesson of Rome” is not a reactionary preservation by isolation, and Le Corbusier’s pictures of Rome are not allegory or anachronism. Instead, there is a sense in both Le Corbusier and Mussolini of a fatalistic palingenesis: their revolution is a destined rebirth that must be activated by a purification of the metaphysical ground. In 1922, the first year of Fascist rule, Mussolini introduced a new Fascist calendar and renumbered the year 1922 “Year 1 EF” (Era Fascista). Revolution in this sense is no return to a constituted past, redacted or untouched, but to creation ex nihilo—it is an ontological return. The Italian reception of Le Corbusier’s book was spectacular not because of its valorization of Italy and antiquity, but the promise of a return to the very beginning of time itself. It is with this sense of an elusive degree zero that Le
Corbusier grasps la révolution and le nouveau—for him, these are essentially metaphysical concepts on Time and Being. Le Corbusier’s revolution as a theory of time derived from his reading of Nietzsche’s concept of eternal return in Also sprach Zarathustra, on the infinite rebirth of the universe rooted in the ancient Greek Stoic philosophy on the cyclical nature of temporality. Eternal return is a concept Nietzsche also used to defend Amor fati—the choice to love one’s fate including suffering, loss, destruction—hence the notion of revolution as a creative-destruction that resurfaces in Le Corbusier.

These ideas are evident even in Le Corbusier’s choice of title, Vers une architecture. “Toward” indicated the elusive character of time, of futurity, and of their expression in architectural terms. “Des yeux qui ne voient pas” came from Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem Le phénomène futur. Le Corbusier saw himself as Henri Provensal’s artiste du futur and the Nietzschean Surhumain—as summarized by Turner, “a new type of man … who embodies the Future.” Thus his architectural vision, which I have elsewhere described as an “esprit futur,” reached for the eternal return: a spirit of the future materialized in an idealized permanent present. It is not only Zarathustra’s mastery of “la bête,” but the mastery of temporality and the future itself that inspired Le Corbusier. The revue’s name was also indebted to Apollinaire’s manifesto “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes” which captured the revolution Le Corbusier had in mind (the two met in 1908): “They will carry you … Into universes which tremble ineffably above our heads. Into those nearer and further universes which gravitate to the same point of infinity as what we carry within us … a renewal of ourselves, that eternal creation, that endless rebirth by which we live.”

Le Corbusier’s very definition of geometric volumes was an effect of the horizon illuminated by the sun to express the “eternal Ideal” or “absolute.” Such concepts are more evocative of Hegel than Nietzsche. However, unlike the studies connecting Le Corbusier to Nietzsche, the unconscious Hegelianism that underpins Le Corbusier’s writing has been neglected, with one exception. Paul Venable Turner’s dissertation of 1971 established the Hegelian basis of Le Corbusier, not through any documented reading or knowledge of Hegel by Le Corbusier, but rather by tracing the Geist, Hegel’s “pure spirit” as it survives in Le Corbusier’s thought. According to Turner, it was through Le Corbusier’s study of Provensal’s book L’art de demain, given to him by his teacher, L'Eplattenier, that Le Corbusier’s voice is Hegelian. Provensal’s philosophy of architecture was based on the nineteenth-century tradition of German Idealism of Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, “especially Hegel,” after Kant, a chain that is reinvoked with Le Corbusier’s very concept L’Esprit nouveau. Turner points out that Le Corbusier was unique in his conception of the Parthenon as “pure création de l’esprit.” Of course, the notions of temporality and le nouveau derive from the Greeks, yet “spirit” as the essence of revolution is quintessentially Hegelian, from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, and it re-appears in Nietzsche. Le Corbusier had studied Renan’s Vie de Jésus where Jesus is a heroic
“revolutionary,” leading Turner to state that the revolution that most impressed Le Corbusier, the sections he bracketed in Renan’s reading was the revolution of the intellect and devotion to spirit.\textsuperscript{41} Ironically, Le Corbusier dismissed Germany architecturally and culturally (deeming both inferior to Italy and Greece), yet despite having possibly never read Hegel, his philosophy is entrenched in the German metaphysical tradition.

Le Corbusier, like Mussolini, saw himself as a “prophet” with a spiritual calling. The violence that they praised is not populist violence, but the violence of the superman: \textit{La révolution} for Le Corbusier was precisely that of a master like Mussolini. The figure of the master (\textit{surhomme}) is the one feature that continues throughout Le Corbusier’s career irrespective of activities and alliances, left or right. This persistent identification with the master connects him to authoritarian thought and to the Hegelian “master-slave dialectic,” the seminal passage of Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}.

“At the threshold of the house they will install a vigilant guardian: the conditions of nature. On their coming, the revolution will be accomplished.”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, Le Corbusier does not mean revolution in the Marcuse or Marxian sense. Architecture is not a surrogate for revolution in Le Corbusier, and neither does revolution mean “mass housing” or the “engineer’s aesthetic.” Le Corbusier’s theory of revolution does not derive from Fourier, Saint-Simon or the French Revolution (except when they are derogatory references), but rather from Nietzsche and Hegel. Le Corbusier’s philosophy is not political philosophy, anyway, but Western metaphysics in the tradition of German aesthetics: that is the real site of \textit{la Révolution}.

I propose that European statecraft in the 1920s and 1930s is a better model for understanding revolution in Le Corbusier’s philosophical schemata, than France’s serial revolutions and its bloody past. What Le Corbusier produces is not a theory of French State formation but an architectural formation suspended in the viscid fluid of an \textit{eternal present}—a perpetual rebirth of architecture’s future in the present moment. These concepts and themes were circulating in France through exposure to Italian politics and its prevailing theories of temporality, essential to the fascist conceptual apparatus. Le Corbusier’s love of Italy and admiration of the Fascist Italian revolution contributed in a disturbing yet elusive way to the development of Le Corbusier’s thought. For this reason, perhaps, Le Corbusier’s politics on the right may have received less exposure in the architectural academy than the architect’s views on social reform. This is not to rehabilitate the dialectical theory of Le Corbusier’s ideation, to the right and left. Rather, the task ahead is to examine the despotic contents of Le Corbusier’s version of utopia, the very genealogy of utopia and authoritarianism in the French Enlightenment, and its culmination in the French Revolution (1789) where such contradictory discourses and concepts freely circulated.

The Hegelian method identified in Le Corbusier and Mussolini provides critical insight into the Zeitgeist between the two wars, and is further key to the relation between the two prolific writers. This is not to say that Hegel is the ‘philosopher of fas-
cism’ in any reductive sense, as Nietzsche was ascribed to Nazism; but, in the sense, that Hegel and Plato are fundamental to Western thought and the birth of modernity at the dawning of fascist ideology. Adorno and Horkeimer’s project situated Hegelian philosophy as fundamental to the relation of modernity and fascism, a problem they called the “dialectic of enlightenment,” the reversion of humanism to barbarism under Enlightenment philosophy. Obversely, postwar historiography situated modern art and the avant-garde against fascism, notwithstanding the work of the Frankfurt School on the complicity of the avant-garde with conservative ideologies during the Third Reich. It was only by the 1980s and 1990s that a number of studies emerged on the contribution of modernism and avant-garde culture to the formation of fascist ideologies between the wars. These studies were undertaken by historians in Political Science, Art History, French Studies, and German History; notably, Mark Antliff’s essay on Le Corbusier and the anarcho-syndicalist Georges Valois, in his edited collection on Fascism and Art; and Zeev Sternhell’s account of Le Corbusier’s affiliation with Valois’s group. Within the architectural academy, the most important work on fascism and Le Corbusier has been undertaken by Mary McLeod, Robert Fishman, and Jean Louis Cohen, as noted earlier.

Yet, the relationship between architectural modernity and fascism remains in some other, unspoken sense ungraspable—a block in architectural thought. There is a vast literature on the architectures of regime in Italy and Germany during the two wars. But the question has been historically conceived by way of an allegorical model, toward the symbolic value of fascist architecture, such as Italian rationalism, in serving or representing a regime—within the circuit of patronage or profit. Likewise, historians have depicted the embrace of Le Corbusier by the Faisceau, who believed Le Corbusier’s plans represented their mythic La Cité, as naïve or not fully grasping Le Corbusier’s work. These representational schemata fail to engage the question of how philosophical fascism was instrumental to the conceptual methodologies of the avant-garde, to dominant modernism as imaginaire and the formulation of architectural objecthood. It is possible that fascism was not the enemy of modernism, but its principal technique.
1 Le Corbusier to William Ritter, 7 April 1922, R3(19)/391, FLC: “Architecture et révolution;” “suite des articles dans l’EN.”

2 He had already published Étude sur le mouvement d’art décoratif en Allemagne in 1912, and Après le cubism in 1918 with Amédée Ozenfant, but Vers une architecture was Jeanneret’s book debut.


6 Viz in Après le cubisme (1918), the November issue of L’Esprit nouveau (1921), and also in a letter to his parents (1919). Invoice from L’Esprit nouveau to G.[eorges] Crès, 9 January 1923, A1/10, FLC; advertisement in Amédée Ozenfant, Après le cubisme (Paris: Editions des Commentaires, 1918),


11 See McLeod and Cohen.

12 See McLeod, Urbanism and Utopia: Le Corbusier from Regional Syndicalism to Vichy, 6.


16 See Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, 260-61.

17 Petit, Le Corbusier Lui-Même.

18 Le Corbusier to Paul Otlet, 29 June 1934, FLC: “En fait d’exposition, j’ai vu deux manifestations capitales: l’une a Rome — Exposition de la Révolution — l’autre a Milan — Exposition de l’Aéronautique — qui ont fait des miracles de visualisation et d’enseignement.” My translation and italics. In August, the same year, Le Corbusier praised Italy in a Fascist revue: “the present spectacle of Italy, the state of her spiritual powers, announces the imminent dawn of the modern spirit. Her radiance, by its purity and force, illuminates the paths that have been obscured by the cowardly and the profiteers.” Le Corbusier, “L’esprit Romain et l’esthétique de la Machine,” Side Futuristica 1, no. 2 [August 1934], 13. On Le Corbusier’s “extreme enthusiasm” for the Exhibition of the Anniversary of the March on Rome see: Libero Andreotti, “The Aesthetics of War: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,” Journal of Architectural Education 45, no. 2 [February 1992], 76-86.

19 I will from hereon use the capitalized “Fascism” to refer to the Italian Fascist movement of Benito Mussolini and otherwise the lower case “fascism” for any other reference to fascism as theory or praxis in Europe. Le Corbusier’s admiration of war and its necessity captures his sense of an authoritarian revolution, as opposed to Marxist revolution. Andreotti writes that Le Corbusier thought “that warfare on a national scale had taken over the best that political [proletarian] revolution had to offer; war had absorbed the latter’s dynamic potential, that is, revolution’s vocation to accelerate time while neutralizing revolution’s socio-economic effects...” See Andreotti, “The Aesthetics of War: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution.”


21 Robert J. Soucy, “The Nature of Fascism in France,” Journal of Contemporary History 1, no. 1 [1966], 27-55. “According to René Rémond, fascism was a phenomenon quite alien to French political traditions. Most of the so-called fascist leagues of the 1920s and ’30s were not really fascist at all but Bona-partist and Boulangist in character and inspiration, connected with past nationalistic movements.” See René Rémond, La Droite En France de 1815 à Nos Jours; Continuité et Diversité D’une Tradition Politique (Paris: Aubier, 1954), 207. Soucy contests this view exemplified in Rémond for the reason that philosophical fascism was deeply rooted in France even though France did not openly embrace “fascism.”


23 Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini, “La Dottrina Del Fascismo,” in Enciclopedia Italiana (1932), Gentile’s and Mussolini’s essay is the opening section of the encyclopaedia entry “Fascismo.” The official translation was printed in the Fascist government publication Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism (1932),” in Fascism Doctrine and Institutions, ed. Benito Mussolini (Rome: Ardita Publishers, 1935).


25 Turner argues that Le Corbusier retained the early German idealist position learned from Provensal until the end of his career. Paul


27 Such political ambivalence is symptomatic of the authoritarian complex. The incorrect notion of ambivalence as indecisiveness or lack of rigour creates an historical shield from authoritarian thought, where such contradictions are critical symptoms, to be examined, not accidents.


35 Simone Brott, “Esprit Futur,” *Log* 23 (Fall 2011).


37 Le Corbusier, *Le voyage d’Orient* (Paris: Editions Parenthèses, 1987), 125. “I think that the flatness of the horizon, particularly at noon when it imposes its uniformity on everything about it, provides for each one of us a measure of the most humanly possible perception of the absolute. In the radiant heat of the afternoon, suddenly there appears the pyramid of Athos!” Le Corbusier was drawn to the “limitless horizon of the southern sea.” My translation.


43 These include Zeev Sternhell, Jeffrey Herf, Alice Kaplan, Richard Golsan, Mark Antliff, Romy Golan, Boris Groys.


46 In her discussion on the *Faisceau*, McLeod reveals Valois’s great admiration of Le Corbusier’s work for wordlessly representing the Faisceau, on a purely symbolic level, without Valois having had any substantive conception of Le Corbusier’s work. McLeod, *Urbanism and Utopia: Le Corbusier from Regional Syndicalism to Vichy*, 101.
In a 2010 article, historian Caroline Ford analyzed a phenomenon that began in Western Europe about a decade ago: the emergence of a new wave of museums devoted to non-European art and culture. England, Belgium and France, among others, have begun organizing and exhibiting the “exotic vestiges” of two centuries of imperial expansion. This is part of a cultural strategy to come to terms with the past, materialized in the economic and socio-political consequences of the decolonization processes. Either in line or tension with the multicultural fantasies of neoliberalism, these institutions have sought to neutralize a permanent source of anxiety and conflicts in contemporary Europe. A similar process is taking place in South America, where several states have begun to translate the problematic legacies of their recent histories into the language of the museum: between 2006 and 2012 six museums of memory and human rights will have been inaugurated in the region. Following the examples of Paraguay and Uruguay, which led the first official attempts to cope with the traces of state violence, Argentina and Chile have recently institutionalized the memory of the systematic human rights violations perpetrated by their respective military dictatorships with the inauguration of two new museums. Peru and Colombia are currently working on the construction of homologous institutions that will preserve and display visual and material evidence of their long-lasting internal conflicts. Compounding these six cases suggests that the region is immersed in what NYU professor Paul Williams has defined as the “global rush to commemorate atrocities.”

What follows is a reflection on the design and curatorial strategy of one of these new institutions, Chile’s Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights, hereafter MMDH), opened in 2010 to remember the victims of state repression during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). By assessing the dynamics among sections, themes, images, and objects in the exhibition’s script, and in the dialogue between the museum and two contemporary art pieces incorporated into the museum circuit, I evaluate how the museum-going experience relates to the political project of the institution. Likewise, I reflect on the material challenges associated with the representation of violence and the reconstruction of legitimacy in the aftermath of state terror and argue that this museum solves these challenges by shielding and perpetuating political and economic principles connected with the legacies of the dictatorship.
Under the Box

Located in the Yungay neighborhood—an area inhabited by immigrants, young professionals, and working-class families—the MMDH is today one of the most active poles of what has been defined as the “cultural axis” of western Santiago. It is situated close to Matucana 100, a center for the arts inaugurated in 2001; the Library of Santiago, opened in 2005, an expansion of the National Library; the Quinta Normal of Santiago, a nineteenth-century botanical park that encompasses several museums; the western branch of the Museum of Contemporary Art; the Museum of Education Gabriela Mistral, among other cultural institutions. The contemporary architecture of the building contrasts, however, with the more traditional character of its neighbors. The museum appears as a striking glass and steel box clad in prepatinated cooper (18 m wide, 80 m long, and 15 m high, or 59 by 263 by 50 ft) mounted on robust concrete bases rising out of two reflecting pools. The building is oriented along an east-west axis and a subtle elevation from the street level reinforces its monumentality. The north and south facades are clad with tempered glass, coated with a thin cooper mesh to diminish the impact of direct sunlight, and crisscrossed by metal bars. Visitors enter from the south through a concrete ramp with a gentle slope that slides under the body of the museum (between the concrete bases), and ends in an open space 6 m (20 ft) below street level called Memory Square (Figure 1). They can also access this agora-like space through two wide staircases located in the north side of the complex, which become an improvised seating area when the agora is used for public events. Both the ramp and the staircases were conceived as transitional spaces that allow visitors enough time to connect themselves to the “museum experience.”

This Memory Square is the main point of access to the museum, leading into the first room of the exhibition, “Human Rights. A Universal Challenge.” This section contains what has been described as the two ideological pillars of the museum: the reports of the truth commissions organized by the Chilean state during the Concertación governments (the bureaucratic pillar) and the network of memorials built throughout the country to remember the victims of Pinochet’s dictatorship (the social pillar). The Chilean truth commissions are introduced via an installation comprising a world map constituted by more than 300 pictures portraying episodes of human rights violations and some attempts of reparation; a museographic text explaining the global emergence of truth commissions around the world; and a set of thirty small frames describing the functioning, research period, objectives, and achievements of these commissions.

In front of this installation, a small shelf displays copies of the reports submitted by the three bureaucratic bodies charged with documenting human rights violations during the period between 1973 and 1990. A plaque above states that these reports constitute an essential reference for the permanent exhibition and the muse-
Figure 1 Mario Figueroa, Lucas Fehr, and Carlos Dias, Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, 2010. Lateral view of the building’s north façade from Chacabuco street.

Figure 2 “Grill.” Repression and Torture room, Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, 2010. Metal bed frame connected to an electroshock machine; the upper screen projects testimonies of tortured political prisoners.
um’s patrimony, further fetishizing these objects. The second ideological pillar, the
memorials, is represented further down the hall. A touch screen provides a detailed
description of 174 sites of mourning and remembrance identified throughout the
country. A plaque above the screen offers a somewhat irrelevant description of what
memorials are and what their purpose is—there is no reference to links between
them and the museum’s program. On the floor, a large stone sculpture represents
the map of Chile with eighty-four white metal signs disorderly embedded in it. They
reproduce the information provided by the touch screen.

The imbalance in the treatment of the two pillars is evident. The pale and some-
what untidy recognition of the historical role played by memorials reads as a forced
gesture that does not match the visual weight and solemnity attributed to the truth
commissions. In the relation between state bureaucracy and society, the former
eclipses the latter. Consequently, it becomes difficult not to consider the long-term
implications of the state monopoly over memory, particularly in the case of a state
that for the last twenty years has consistently disassembled the social forces that put
an end to the dictatorship. While emerging as the logical sequel to the work accom-
plished by the truth commissions, the museum also signals a break from the tradition
of memorials in Chile.8 In a subtle act of substitution, the museum introduces itself
as a cleaner, more sophisticated version of all previous attempts at mourning and
remembrance. Thus, the social pillar is made into a pre-history that must remain
inactive in the basement of the building.

The Ark or the Glass Box

Estudio America, an architecture office based in São Paulo, Brazil, was commissioned
for the construction of the MMDH.9 Their written proposal plays with abstract con-
cepts—nonlinear time, fragmentary memories, transparency, autochthony, national
geography, and allegories of commodities—as a means to explain the internal logic
of the museum. However, the proposal does not clarify how the building responds
to its historical purpose. It states why the project combines glass, steel, natural and
artificial light, copper, coal, and concrete and why that mixture may appeal to visi-
tors. Yet what remains unclear is the kind of relationship the interpretation of these
materials, and the way they interact, have with the memory this museum seeks to
preserve. In contrast to other proposals for the project, Estudio America’s includes
neither reference to the historical period covered nor any mention of the dictator-
ship. The expression “human rights” appears only once; the words disappeared, tor-
ture, victims, violence, or coup d’état are absent.10 How are we to read these elisions
and omissions?

The proposal is rich in metaphors suggesting how the building works in the mind
of its architects—let us consider three of them. The first relates to the skin of copper
that clads the museum. This skin not only pays homage to a noble metal that has
played a major role in the Chilean economy, pointing to one of the major achievements of Salvador Allende’s government (1970-1973), the nationalization of this natural resource. Its presence also defines how the memory of state violence must be processed. By filtering the sunlight—and protecting the museum’s patrimony—the copper skin functions as an “allegory of a memory that reveals its content in a subtle way.”

In other words, this memory must not be violent or disruptive: it must reveal itself delicately, gently. A second metaphor refers to the problem of light and its use in the museographic narrative. If, on the one hand, the strategic control of sunlight relates to the idea of tamed transparency, on the other hand, it exerts an anesthetic effect. Architect Miguel Lawner, imprisoned and sent into exile during the dictatorship, summarized this operation with precision in a brief essay on the architectural design of the museum: “Arguably, the fact of being in a space always bright, a cheerful space, is a way to reduce the tensions generated by an exhibition that shows such traumatic episodes in our history.”

The third metaphor concerns the way the elevated position of the building and how its connection with the rest of the complex defines the status of the memory it contains. In several passages from the architects’ proposal, the museum is introduced as both an ark and a glass box. Both images serve the same purpose. When defined as an ark in which the Chilean society can store all the recollections of its bloody political flood, memory appears as a floating territory, uprooted from everyday life. As a glass box, the building becomes a delicate memory device that levitates above two water pools.

These are precisely the ideas the design suggests in the transition towards the core of the building. At the end of the first hall (still below ground level), visitors find a long staircase. Along the right wall of the stair is a screen-print of a large color photomontage including four overlapping pictures of demonstrations, three of them taken prior to the coup d’état. Upon reaching the landing, the screen-print disappears and is replaced by a band of transparent glass that coincides with the level of the water pools, signaling the entry into the elevated copper-clad body of the building. A second set of screen-prints located above the transparent band reinforces the idea of a temporal and spatial break, with pictures of military officers taking prisoners from the presidential palace the day of the coup d’état. The visitors enter a large, triple-height hall. The first section, entitled “September 11, 1973,” is devoted to reconstructing that day as an event. The exhibition circulation proceeds upward with lateral stairs along the illuminated exterior leaving the central space to display the bulk of the exhibition. By favoring bright and cheerful spaces, and distancing street demonstrations from the actions of the coup, the architects have chosen to confront these memories in a very specific way. But there is a section in which the museographic narrative interrupts the tone set by the architectural design: the challenges associated with representing state violence come to mark one of the most dramatic turns of the exhibition.
Repression and Torture

One of the most problematic sections of the MMDH is a room on the first floor dedicated to incidents of repression and torture during the dictatorship. This is the physically darkest area of the exhibition. Its boundaries are clearly defined by a black metal structure. Its walls, also black, are covered with small gray letters marking the names of the 30,000 victims that testified in front of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture between 2003 and 2005. Off to one side are two small dark rooms with recorded testimonies of former political prisoners. They are followed by five interconnected stations that address, in this order, the characteristics and geographical dispersion of the detention and torture centers, the executions of political prisoners, methods of torture used by the agents of repression, the search for the disappeared, and the finding of bodies and skeletal remains throughout the country. A final and independent section reconstructs, by means of videos, drawings, and letters, the exile, torture, suffering, imprisonment, and disappearance of children. Two lateral galleries surround this enclosure and complete this part of the exhibition. One focuses on the everyday life in detention centers; testimonies of survival and resistance are accompanied by the display of crafts and leather goods made by political prisoners during their captivity. The other reconstructs the strategies of communication between the inmates and their families. By means of letters and small notes, meticulously displayed, visitors gain access to the intimacy of these contacts.

This section stands as a dark oasis within the museum, escaping the image of tamed transparency. The most shocking installation included here is a “grill” (a metal bed frame) connected to an electroshock machine (Figure 2). A selection of testimonies is projected on a screen above. The voices of the victims, which can be heard persistently, play a major role: “I was bleeding from the navel, bleeding from the vagina, bleeding from the nipples, from my nose, my mouth, and my ears. I was kind of a bloody mess.” It is here where memory operates with all its power. Confronted with the voices of those wounded bodies, with their pain, disorientation, fear, and solitude, visitors are forced to take a stand. The lived experience of an individual victim, with all its ethical implications and analytical pitfalls, dominates the situation. Some visitors show empathy, trying to connect themselves with the painful experiences of those that share their memories. Others will see themselves as improvised judges in a moral tribunal, reenacting and validating the logic of extrajudicial reparation that sustain the truth and reconciliation commissions. What are the implications of these reactions?

Several scholars have cautioned against the risks of fetishizing the category of victim of human rights violations. What happens when this category turns into a fixed, naturalized, and homogenous identity? Is it possible to transcend the distinctions between victims and non-victims—based on the idea that the victim is a subject with exclusive attributes—for the sake of new collective projects? Psychologists Isabel Pipper
and Marisela Montenegro address these issues through the examination of the political construction of the “victim” in contemporary Chile. This questioning, of course, does not mean to promote oblivion or to ignore the strategic function this category has played in promoting certain policies and reparation measures. It intends, on the contrary, to seek for strategies to avoid the pervasive effects (universalization, homogenization, potential cooptation) of the routinization of identity categories that no longer question the institutional order. According to Pipper and Montenegro’s reading, the current challenge is to evaluate the implications of the idea of damaged subjectivities—and the social limits they create—in order to identify new possibilities of agency and transformation in the realm of politics. After reassessing our memories of the dictatorship, these authors state, we would be able to redefine the range of political alternatives in the contemporary search for social change.

Other scholars, including Greg Grandin, have analyzed the consequences of the “shift away from trying to understand the historical causes and social consequences of violence to an almost exclusive focus on how violence is experienced.” Operating within the hermeneutic rather than the analytical wing of the humanities and social sciences, Grandin argues, these new interpretations have tended to reduce acts of political violence (like torture) to singular human experiences that escape from any effort of human understanding. In so doing, Grandin asserts, by “taking violence itself—not its effects or causes—as the subject of analysis, theorists of violence […] void the possibility of analysis, approaching terror not by examining its productive function but by stressing its epistemological mystery, its literal senselessness.”

In a related text, Grandin and Thomas Klubock have shown how the individualizing logic of the truth and reconciliation commissions, the forensic approach that rules their works, and the compartmentalized treatment of the past they promote, have tended to disaggregate the collective nature of social justice struggles and to evade a confrontation with the structural inequalities and conflicts that gave rise to human rights violations. “In the end,” Greg Grandin and Thomas Klubock sustain, “the focus on specific cases, individual victims, and individual perpetrators abets the slippery move from individual experiences of trauma and healing to social structure and political process.”

Thus, the museographic strategy of the “Repression and torture” room embodies most of the tensions identified by Pipper, Montenegro, Grandin and Klubock. By atomizing the experience of survivors and victims of state violence and representing that very violence in terms that obscure its connection with, for example, the distribution of power and resources within Chilean society, the museum’s narrative tends to fix a discourse that reinforces a compartmentalized vision of the catastrophe, promotes isolated rituals of mourning and remembrance, and detaches the past from the contemporary legacies of the dictatorship.
Individualistic Obsessions

This emphasis on the idea of individual victims and the decontextualized treatment of political violence also pervades two artworks installed in the museum. The first is Jorge Tacla’s *Al mismo tiempo, en el mismo lugar* (At The Same Time, in The Same Place, 2010) situated in front of the souvenir shop and the cafeteria, near the museum entrance just off Memory Square (Figure 3). The artwork consists of a series of enameled metal sheets that reproduce an internal view of the Víctor Jara Stadium, a building that served as torture and detention center and the site where the singer Víctor Jara was tortured and murdered a few days after the coup. While being detained, Jara wrote a poem, divided it into fragments and had it sent to his wife, Joan Jara, thanks to prisoners who were allowed to leave the stadium. According to the museum’s description, Tacla took some verses from the poem (thus recalling the fragmentary way in which the poem left the stadium) and transcribed them on the enameled surface using a torch (symbolizing pain and the malleability of our bodies). The text was then marked with white and dark stains meant to evoke traumas and skeletal remains. “The poem,” Tacla explains, “is a vivid record that, from the place of violence and under the threat of death, represents the ultimate expression of an artist.”

Jara’s poem is characterized by a strong sense of the collective: “There are five thousand of us here / in this small part of the city/ We are five thousand / I wonder how many we are in all / in the cities and in the whole country? / Here alone / are ten thousand hands which plant seeds / and make the factories run.” Even though this collective emphasis somewhat counteracts the individualistic sense of Tacla’s interpretation, it cannot challenge the assumptions that sustain the final result: while state violence is processed as a self-referential phenomenon, torture is reduced to a sum of subjective experiences, and the history of the committed militant (in this case, Jara) is replaced by the myth of the unarmed martyr.

Through *Geometría de la conciencia* (The Geometry of Conscience, 2010), the second artwork under discussion, artist Alfredo Jaar tries to establish a critical dialogue with both the museum structure and its museographic script. The work is located outside the museum’s structure, in a tomb-like space, underneath Memory Square. This subterranean location creates a space defined in dialectic terms with the museum’s premises: instead of elevation, depth; instead of luminosity, darkness. After descending a narrow staircase, visitors cross a thick door controlled by one of the museum’s guides. The chamber is small and dark. The door is closed and visitors wait in total darkness for a minute or so. Suddenly, a panel of white lights, covered by acrylic, turns on in front of the visitors. Five hundreds silhouettes appear. Two huge mirrors located on the opposite sides of the chamber multiply these images to infinity (Figure 4). A new dialectics comes into play: instead of photographs, silhouettes. They are not anonymous at all. They correspond to five hundred Chileans, most of them victims of the dictatorship, but there are also non-victims.
Figure 3 Jorge Tacla, Al mismo tiempo, en el mismo lugar (At The Same Time, in The Same Place), Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, 2010.

Figure 4 Alfredo Jaar, Geometría de la conciencia (The Geometry of Conscience), Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, 2010.
This is the strategy that allows Jaar to transcend the contingent frontier between victims and non-victims, questioned by Pipper and Montenegro. By eroding this paralyzing distinction, Jaar not only stresses the idea that “we all lost something with the dictatorship,” but also situates the challenges to our memory in the future and its collective construction, and not only in the individual act of remembering the past. Although it is clear that we all lost something to the crimes of the dictatorship, Jaar’s work does not question why that had to be so. In this sense, Geometría de la conciencia tackles the problem of the limits of the representation of violence in the aesthetic-political axis, but it does not explore the function of violence in the historical-political one. Violence is here an aftereffect, a given fact, not a practice to be addressed. Maybe that is the reason why Chilean artist Lucía Egaña defined this work as an appendix, as a mere gesture of contemporaneity. “[Jaar’s work] is too aesthetic and should be in an art museum. That is why I think it was located outside. Its function is not other than proving that here there is room for contemporary issues.”

The concept behind Geometría de la conciencia and the museum’s script intersect in the section “Absence and Memory,” situated on the second floor. Visitors are given a preview of this section upon entering the main building. From here they see a glass box that cantilevers into the triple-height space of the main hall. Facing this chamber—basically a viewing platform—the wall is covered with hundreds of photographs. “Absence and Memory” recalls the velatones, a common practice consisting of lighting candles in significant places as a sign of mourning and/or protest. Inside the chamber, a set of fake candles placed at floor level (to be more precise, a set of solid cylinders of clear acrylic with a cut of 45º at the tip that concentrates the artificial light coming from the base) remembers the victims of the dictatorship, whose faces can be seen across the wall (Figures 5, 6). Some frames have no pictures and have been replaced by black or white cardboard. In addition to suggesting the unfinished character of both the installation and the museum’s mission, this is also meant as sign of institutional openness. Visitors are invited to take part in the completion of the museum’s patrimony through the donation of pictures of those who are still absent from this sanitized memorial. Finally, by means of a touch screen located in the middle of the room, next to a large bench that offers rest and time for reflection, visitors can search for the names of the victims and read descriptions of their death and disappearance circumstances as registered in the truth commissions’ reports.

The tension between Jaar’s silhouettes and the set of pictures hung on the wall reflects larger debates on the political and aesthetic challenges associated with the representation of violence and the way such exercises intervene, from the present, in the dialogue between past and future. If talking about violence, death, and politics is always a delicate task, it is made more difficult when an institution of this type processes a haunting past through the accumulation of individual tragedies rather than collective causes. This individualizing attitude completely pervades the museum’s script and, to some extent, Jaar’s work. Is it possible to pay attention to the need for
Figure 5 Absence and Memory room, Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, 2010.

Figure 6 Absence and Memory room, detail.
individual recognition without undermining the social character of a political defeat? Do we have enough methodological tools to dignify personal histories without compartmentalizing the past? What do we have to recover for our own times, the suffering of the victims, the pain of the tortured, or the ideas that animated them?

**Subverting a Socialist Maxim**

Today, the MMDH is one of the most active museums in the country. Between August 2010 and July 2011, the museum had 90,748 visitors—equivalent to fifteen percent of the average annual visits to the national network of public museums.\(^2\) Thanks to an effective public relations strategy, and despite the campaigns of its critics, it has gained an important space among the “cultural institutions” created by the transitional governments of the *Concertación* coalition.\(^3\) Precisely because of this, it is important to map its role in contemporary politics and the ways, along with its counterparts throughout the continent, it is helping shield and perpetuate the political and economic values promoted by the Latin American liberal democracies. This interest in reinforcing a political culture based on the respect for human rights might be nothing more than a sophisticated translation of a way of doing politics that combines the overexploitation of the concept of memory and the confinement of the most pressing consequences of state violence to the realm of the past, a past that is remembered through a plastic and malleable individual memory. To quote Susan Sontag: “Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory and not enough to thinking.”\(^4\)

This is why the representation of violence in the MMDH is critical. Pain, suffering, disorientation, mutilation, solitude, disappearance, torture, murder, darkness, all these tropes are here introduced as the result of the “unnatural” coincidence between violence and politics. Thus, there is no reflection on the political function of violence. There is pure violence represented in a fashion that directly appeals to the fragility of the body. Furthermore, by emphasizing the atrocities perpetrated in the past by a state that magically does not resemble and has no relationship with the actual state, by promoting an ideological and practical distance between the material and symbolic benefits of today and the brutality and precariousness of a dark past, by suggesting that outside the liberal state the individual citizen becomes vulnerable, Latin American governments are now recycling and subverting a classic socialist maxim: the precept of these times seems to be *liberal democracy or barbarism*. 

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\(^2\) Materiality and Politics in Chile’s Museum of Memory and Human Rights

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Estefane
An extended version of this paper was presented at the XXX International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, San Francisco, California, 2012. I thank Robin Greeley, Daniel R. Quiles and all the attendees to the panel “Art, Architecture & the Social in Modern and Contemporary Latin America” for their generous comments.

1 Caroline Ford, “Museums after Empire in Metropolitan and Overseas France,” The Journal of Modern History 82 (September 2010), 625-661.

2 Paraguay inaugurated its first museum of memory in 2006; Uruguay did the same in 2007. Argentina and Chile opened their museums in 2010. Lugar de la Memoria in Lima, Peru, and Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, Colombia, were set to open in 2012.


4 The crisscross pattern somewhat recalls that of the windows of Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum.

5 Mario Figueroa, Lucas Fehr, and Carlos Días, “El programa,” in Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Santiago: Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, 2010), 42. The idea of “agora” comes from the essay “Una manzana abierta,” by Miguel Lawner, included in same publication. The block in which the museum is located was originally to serve a different purpose. As part of the reform of Santiago’s transportation system, the nowadays infamous Transantiago project, the Ministry of Public Works ordered to start excavation works to set the foundations of a huge intermodal station. The excavation works stopped in early 2006 and the heavy equipment was withdrawn in May of the same year. The collective of architects in charge of the construction of the museum (to be described later) took advantage of these excavations to design this underground agora. The museum has an underground connection to the subway.

6 The Concertación, or Concert of Parties for Democracy, is the coalition of center-left political parties that led the transition to democracy in Chile. It ruled since the end of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship until 2010, when it was defeated by the right-wing Coalición por el Cambio (Coalition for Change) led by billionaire businessman Sebastián Piñera.

7 They were the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (1991), the National Corporation for Reparation and Reconciliation (1996), and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (2004).

8 For an interesting reflection on one of these memorials, Villa Grimaldi, and the challenges derived from the plurality of voices that take part in the construction of a collective site, see Michael J. Lazzara, “Tres recorridos de Villa Grimaldi,” in Monumentos, memoriales y marcas territoriales, eds. Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Langland (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2003), 127-147. From the same author, “Dos propuestas de conmemoración pública: Londres ‘88 y el Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos,” A Contraoriente 8, no. 3 (Spring 2011), 55-90. Lazzara offers in this last article a description and critique of the MMDH that may be read in parallel to ours. Regarding the history of memorial in Chile, see Memoriales de Chile. Homenajes a las víctimas de violaciones de derechos humanos entre 1973 y 1990 (Santiago: Flacso-Chile, 2007).

9 Carlos Días, Lucas Fehr, and Mario Figueroa were the architects in charge. A fourth professional, Roberto Ibieta, worked as technical manager and associate architect in Chile.


11 Mario Figueroa, Lucas Fehr, and Carlos Días, “El concepto,” in Museo de la Memoria, 42. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.


13 Isabel Pipper and Mariela Montenegro, “Análisis critico de la categoría de ‘victima’: Aperturas para la acción política,” Actual Marx Intervenciones 6 (First Semester 2008), 125-137.


18 Besides its collective tone, Jara’s poem also transmits a clear consciousness of the character and origin of the violence he was experiencing and witnessing. The detailed description of his comrades’ pain and the torturers’ minds, his references to the horrors of fascism, or even his militant calls for global condemnation are dimensions that unfortunately did not find room in Tachá’s installation. Víctor Jara, “Chile Stadium,” September 1973. The quoted fragment comes from the transla-


21 Both the touch screen and the brochures the museum provides explain how visitors can participate in the completion of the memorial. Of course, the museum keeps total control of the museography, so visitors cannot bring pictures and install them themselves. In fact, the museum was closed in late February-early March 2012 due to the addition of new pictures to this section.

22 Ricardo Brodsky, “El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos,” Revista Museos 30 (2011), 47. The national network of public museums encompasses twenty-three institutions distributed across the country. They are administered and materially depend on the Directorate of Libraries, Archives, and Museums (DIBAM). The Museum of Memory and Human Rights is directed by a private non-profit foundation, but receive financial support from the government through DIBAM. Regarding the temporal frame of these statistics, it has to be remembered that the museum remained closed for five months after the February 27, 2010 earthquake. Interestingly, between its inauguration and the day before the earthquake, more than 103,000 people had visited it.

Is it possible that the antonym of ‘forgetting’ is not ‘remembering’ but justice?
Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, quoted in Archive Fever

Revolutions, like all traumatic events, are difficult to write. They exist in a liminal time, between two moments, their sources unclear and their effects often reverberating long afterward. Their meaning remains locked in an inarticulate, in-between space that cannot be understood from a position of simply before or after. The inability to write—and the demand for a picture of—the 1989 Romanian revolution was the starting point for an art installation created by Irina Botea, a 22-minute video entitled Auditions for a Revolution (2006). The “audition” of the title already implies a de-temporalization of the revolution, an attempt to unveil the repercussions of an event that, in a strange way, many Romanians believe may not have even happened.

On December 21, 1989 in Bucharest, Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu stood behind a podium and prepared to respond to a political demonstration that had taken place a few days prior in the city of Timisoara (Figure 1). Unrest had been spreading throughout the impoverished country, and the televised speech was intended to provide the anxious nation with a pacifying illusion of order and stability. Accordingly, a group of dedicated “supporters” were planted in the square, brought in to give the image of a cheered and confident public. The event was constructed as a staged affirmation of the state apparatus, standard practice within a regime where everything on television was state-sponsored. Television was, however, about to shift from a means of oppression to a “site” for revolution, for as Ceausescu spoke and the cameras rolled, revolutionaries flooded the square. Against this eruption of the real into a space of controlled fiction, Ceausescu was unable to respond. With great commotion audible in the background, he was forced to leave his prepared statement. The cameramen were instructed to turn away, but Ceausescu remained at the podium, repeatedly pleading “hello” as though a connection had been lost. The broadcast continued and though viewers saw only an empty backdrop, the absence of the planned program, its sudden interruption, was enough to constitute the beginning of the revolution. The damage to the impression of order was done, and irreparable. Over the next several days, revolutionaries gained the upper hand; they occupied the Central Committee Building where the television studio was located and maintained the live broadcast throughout the duration of the events, resulting in over 120 hours of footage. The coverage ranged from “official” newscasts to readings by dissident poets to fervent debates about the future of the country.
The first attempt to comprehensively present the “televised” revolution was in 1993. Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica consolidated the ten days worth of amateur and official footage into a 106-minute film, *Videograms of a Revolution*. Farocki is a Czech-born German filmmaker; Ujica is a Romanian citizen also living in Germany. Ujica’s connections in Romania facilitated access to the archives of the Central Committee Building broadcast, as well as to recordings produced by citizens. Created from a moment of unprecedented transparency in Romania, *Videograms* has since come to be seen as a type of “documentary” of the revolution. Ujica, in fact, saw film as the core attribute of twentieth century consciousness; *Videograms* was thus also a comment on history, the particular kind of history that unfolded in Romania. He recounts, “The idea at the basis of the project can be summarized in this way: in 1989, a hundred cameras followed what was happening in Romania; history is no longer divided into theatrical scenes, nor into literary chapters—it is perceived as a sequence; and the sequence demands a film.”

*Videograms* assembles footage taken from those cameras into a continuous stream, presenting a sequential and additive version of the revolution. At first glance, it thus seems to record and secure the character of the events, giving a presumably accurate picture for posterity (Figure 2).

In her installation, Botea takes on simultaneously the memory of the revolution and the status of *Videograms* as a document. Botea’s representation of the revolution didn’t take the appropriateness of film for granted, and her project is in dialogue with *Videograms* as much as the revolution itself. *Auditions* pits history against its recording, challenging the understanding of television as a record, one that might serve as a kind of security apparatus. Botea first disassembled the collaged whole of *Videograms* into an unordered series of short clips, then had the skeletal “facts” of the revolution re-enacted, fleshing out the ghosted space of *Videograms*. Though Botea had lived through the revolution, she substituted Farocki and Ujica’s edited narrative for her personal memory, treating each clip as a text to be interrogated through its re-enactment. She chose art and theater students from Chicago to play the part of the revolutionaries, and filmed in parts of the city that most closely resembled 1980s Bucharest. In her production, she tried to visually imitate Farocki and Ujica’s film, producing an uncanny doubling—or a re-doubling—of the revolution. The work is presented as a dual-channel installation, projecting Botea’s version of the events alongside the clips from *Videograms*. We are thus physically situated between two competing views of the revolution (Figure 3).

Choosing to re-construct Farocki and Ujica’s film, rather than the “original footage” of the revolution, highlights the mediated nature of Botea’s work. When the installation was recently shown at the New Museum, the authors of the exhibition catalogue noted, “[The] gap between what is said and what is understood acts as a structuring metaphor throughout [Auditions], pointing to our incomplete understanding of mediated events and to the facets of experience that are lost when such events are rewritten as historical memory.” The New Museum text calls our attention to Botea’s
Figure 1 “Ceausescu last live appearance on TV,” Still from Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, Videograms of a Revolution, 1992.

Figure 2 “First live appearance of the revolution on State TV,” Still from Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, Videograms of a Revolution, 1992.
awareness of loss and ambiguity when history is limited to memory, to memorializing events that remain securely in the past. Yet it fails to articulate what is to be gained from within the absent space of this history. An engagement with the gap between past and present, between memory and politics, produces history as a constantly shifting signifier. *Auditions* offers a new and complex modality of retelling not only for the artist, but also the historian. Its text isn’t written from a position of authority. Rather, Botea’s work can best be described by the grammatical *middle voice*, an archaic tense revived in recent literary theory. Between active and passive, the middle voice is a tense that implies the subject is affected by the action undertaken. It offers an understanding of the way history and its author mutually inflect one another. Staging the revolution after the fact, while holding up the proposition that the “facts” have not yet even happened, Botea’s work sits within a framework of current artistic practice, mainly from East-Central Europe, in which the past becomes not subject to the artwork but the agent of its making.

Several recent exhibitions of art from the former Eastern Europe have focused on this issue. In both *Les Promesses du Passé*, held at the Centre Pompidou in 2010, and *Ostalgia*, recently shown at the New Museum and including Botea’s *Auditions*, the explicit theme has been an engagement with the past that is both nostalgic and ironic. *Les Promesses du Passé*, a title taken from Walter Benjamin’s essay “On the Concept of History,” developed a network of exchanges between artists working pre-1989 and contemporary artists engaging with the lost promise of Communism. The exhibition offered a zigzagging trajectory through a heterogeneous modernity, calling our attention to the myriad ways past and present intertwine. *Ostalgia* likewise addressed itself to an artistic mining of history. The past becomes the medium for a body of work; it is molded and shaped by the artists while dictating the limits of that configuration.

These projects, in engaging with the past in a manner that both mimics and subverts history, demonstrate the potential of the middle voice as an aesthetic gesture, working to keep a traumatic event in play and communicating what is impossible to understand. An examination of the structure of Botea’s work, in particular, will enable us to articulate the possibilities of the middle voice. In highlighting her work’s incompleteness and incomprehensibility, she puts pressure on the relationship between past and present. She also makes room for irony, an irony that challenges our understanding of what it means to responsibly write and record a history. Through a subtle negotiation between poetics and praxis, Botea reveals what is lost to a traditional model of history writing.

To begin, it will be useful to revisit the problematic aspects of monumentalization, which are, in essence, history’s problems. Monuments provide an immediate response to the demand for resolution a traumatic event imposes. They summarize the event, valorize its heroes, and presume to protect it against forgetting. Farocki and
Ujica’s *Videograms of a Revolution*, in its claim to serve as documentation, acts as a monument and consequently elevates the events of the revolution into History. Yet the monument also brings about a kind of forgetting. A monument is an imposition—of voice, tone, and narrative. When trauma is defined as that which is inassimilable or unrecuperable, a premature monumentalization usurps agency and writes over both the trauma and its afterlife. A monument precludes the haunting that is a necessary condition of history, and justice. What we need is a history without monument; we need not only to remember the revolution but to do justice to its complex legacy. Historians, and artists, are caught in a double bind. We must not forget the revolution, but we cannot comprehend it. Trauma cannot be written, but that does not mean it is indeterminate and entirely beyond our reach. Hayden White has explored this difficulty regarding the Holocaust, an event that irrevocably shook history’s claims. He writes:

*The best way to represent the Holocaust and the experience of it may well be a kind of ‘intransitive writing’ which lays no claim to the kind of realism aspired to by the nineteenth-century historians and writers. But we may want to consider that by intransitive writing we must intend something like the relationship to that event expressed in the middle voice.*

With these words, White introduces the *middle voice* in his 1990 essay “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation.” Self-consciously fraught, the middle voice is used most often in actions associated with a heightened moral consciousness. The middle voice overwhelms the interior/exterior of writer/text, overcoming the polarities that otherwise limit writing: the distance between subject and object, agency and patiency, history and myth, past and present. White draws our attention to the importance of the middle voice in the work of Barthes and Derrida, two authors deeply concerned with the limitations of such binary oppositions. When speaking in the middle voice, Barthes explains, “… by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action.” Barthes finds the middle voice particularly relevant to the writer’s task, whereby when I write, *I write myself*. The subject comes into being through the practice of writing. In the same way, the historian comes into being through the practice of writing history. The undecidability of the middle voice also ties it to Derrida’s concept of *différance*, a concept that, as will be discussed below, lends ethical gravity to invocations of the middle voice in historical writing.

White’s philosophy of history is the source of much criticism from historians, who see his work as a challenge to the objectivity and rigor of the discipline. The intellectual historian, Frank R. Ankersmit, however, reads White as offering the possibility for a more poetic and nuanced engagement with historical reality. When the discipline moved away from the romanticized narratives of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians, Ankersmit notes, “this also entailed an often unnoticed loss: that
is, a loss in our openness to historical reality. The great nineteenth-century historians still possessed this openness: they felt a quasi-existential relationship to the past and they did not try or even wish to exclude any part of their highly complex intellectual individualities from their immersion in the past.”

White’s concept of the middle voice indicates what might be gained from an immersive experience in an historical moment.

The status of knowledge is the primary concern in any history, but in the case of trauma we risk missing the point if we claim to know the traumatic event, to assert precedence over the unknowable. In a passage from *Mal d’Archives*, a text originally accompanied by an insert that classified the traumas of the end of the 20th century as *archives du mal*, Derrida addresses the violence of the One:

> As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. L’Un se garde de l’autre. The One guards against some of the other. It protects itself from the other, but, in the movement of this jealous violence, it comprises in itself, thus guarding it, the self-otherness or self-difference (the difference from within oneself) which makes it One... The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to itself but it also institutes itself as violence.

This is the danger of the Enlightenment project, against which Derrida’s philosophical undertaking operates. History, in its desire for narrative, clarity, and order, flirts with the One. Derrida’s text gets at the very foundation of history, a discipline, he claims, that was forever shaken by the invention of psychoanalysis and the discovery of the enduring effects of the unseen, forgotten regions of the self, the capacity for the past to reach into our present. The historian’s difficulty, as one concerned with knowledge that is always at some level inaccessible to him, is exacerbated by trauma, to the point of breaking.

Once we recognize history’s inability to accommodate trauma, we have an obligation to interrogate the limits of our practice and what we can contribute to the reader, and posterity. Trauma scholar Cathy Caruth writes, “for history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence.” Presumptions of accessibility are history’s lie. In seeking alternate possibilities, Caruth turns to literature, to the story of Tancredi, the tragic hero of Torquato Tasso’s epic poem *Gerusalemme liberate* who unknowingly kills his lover and is then forced to relive the scene in repetition. Possessed by trauma, Tancredi takes his sword to a tree, the very tree in which his lover’s spirit is trapped. Her voice is released, and she speaks to Tancredi. It was thus in returning to the site of trauma, and allowing himself to be taken in by its repetition, that Tancredi realizes what he could not have known. Trauma’s truth is always deferred. Caruth examines the possibility of holding the wound open, giving “the
Figure 3 Still from Irina Botea, *Auditions for a Revolution*, 2006.

Figure 4 Still from Irina Botea, *Auditions for a Revolution*, 2006.
enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that
witnesses a truth that Tancredi himself cannot fully know.” This voice, the voice of
the wound, should be the objective of the historian of trauma.

Enter a group of young Americans, awkwardly and with visible discomfort speaking in “Romanian,” reading from a script that Botea derived directly from Farocki and Ujica’s narrative voice-over (Figure 4). As we see them on one screen, they are juxtaposed with clips of Romanians in an adjacent projection, acting out the same gestures, speaking the same words. Approaching this scene in Botea’s installation without prior knowledge of the work, the viewer is faced with the unstable dialectic between past and present. The two images generate a physical and visual proximity between footage from 1989 and the 2006 re-enactment, suggesting a kind of parody, a distorted mirroring of the revolution. The scenes switch rapidly from exterior to interior, chanting groups or solitary announcers. The student-auditioners are not functioning actors, but rather mouthpieces through which the past voices itself. At times, events unfold simultaneously in Bucharest and Chicago; at others, we witness a “behind the scenes” interjection of direction from Botea. The attention to detail verges on the absurd: at one point a student questions the appropriate length of a flag. Another repeatedly fails to correctly pronounce “Comrade Iliescu,” shifting the tragic into the realm of the comic. Witnessing the past in these two disparate views—the ostensibly real and the apparently comedic—we are forced into the presence of history’s irresolvability.

We know from the title of the work that the students are only “auditioning.” They are trying on roles they do not yet inhabit. Botea declares the audition “a moment between theatricality and reality.” The Romanian Revolution—already essentially filmic—was itself situated between theatricality and reality. Ceausescu’s last speech in Bucharest was, after all, carefully staged for the camera. Further, some suspect the revolution to have been an elaborately planned coup d’état. Both went wrong; disorder erupted within what was to be a choreographed scene. Botea’s work allows such irruptions to disturb her direction, making the spontaneous course of history appear less certain within the piece. This complicates the question of agency—both Botea and the actors are beholden to the past, but the past in turn is dependent on their re-enactment of it. They act, but it is in deference to the past. In the same movement, then, they are both telling the revolution, and listening to its history.

Auditioning may in fact be a useful way to consider the job of the historian, who tries out versions of history in an attempt to find an appropriate mode of expression. The middle voice facilitates this destabilization: when we write in the middle voice, we allow history to (partially) inform our present as much as we (partially) reveal its past. For White, “the middle voice suggests not a fixed and abiding selfhood but a sequence of discontinuous partial selves, or the self as a historical process.” The process of history writing is one of mutual discovery, implicating both subject and
Figure 5 Still from Ion Grigorescu, Boxing, 1977.

Figure 6 Still from Irina Botea, Auditions for a Revolution, 2006.
object, writer and text. Ankersmit elaborates: “historical reality … is only encountered in our attempts to define our relationship to our past, in our attempt to ‘write ourselves’ by writing history. Here history functions as the mirror of the radically alien in which we can begin to recognize our own cultural identity.” It is a negotiation between past and present that brings us closest to historical reality—but this negotiation is only possible if we are willing to compromise our own position.

Botea’s problematization of agency echoes a much earlier piece by another Romanian artist, Ion Grigorescu. In Boxing (1977), Grigorescu suggests what it might mean to make art in the middle voice. He has filmed himself, nude, boxing against a superimposed image of himself in the confines of his Bucharest living room. Filmed with an 8mm camera, the grainy black and white image conveys a sparse and tenuous existence (Figure 5). Just over two minutes long, the film is played on a loop, passing endlessly through the same gestures. Every movement is an attack on Grigorescu’s own position, an acknowledgement of his lack of security as an artist in an oppressive regime. Created while living under Ceausescu’s tyranny, where even cameras were forbidden, Boxing demonstrates an awareness of the potentially grave consequences of art-making. Critic Sinziani Ravini suggests his work, if shown in public, could have cost Grigorescu his life. Grigorescu redirects his artistic practice back upon himself, making responsibility adhere within the very form of the work.

Yet Grigorescu’s work also demonstrates the hermeneutic limitations of the middle voice and its potential for insular tautology. He tarries within a pre-revolutionary mode. He was operating within a closed system, and it is that closure that his work reifies. It evokes the suffocation of life under the Iron Curtain with appropriate economy. But for a work of art to have relevance beyond itself, to buoy forth something of the past into the present moment, it requires a degree of accessibility Grigorescu does not offer. There must be a means of approaching the work without destroying its structural integrity. An aperture, then, needs to be always already part of the work.

Back to the students. Everyone is speaking at once. The voices of past and present overlay, creating a looping passage through time. The two strands of Botea’s installation do not remain in stable juxtaposition; past and present do not sit neatly side-by-side. They alternate, switch places, substitute for and replace one another. They also, as they do in this particular moment, align, and one witnesses the superposition of the distorted present and the (likely equally distorted) past. Watching Botea’s work divides the viewer, who is torn between the poignancy of one channel and the brightness of its parody. Where Farocki and Ujica’s film may have lulled us into empathy, Botea does not permit that lapse. We are constantly reminded that the events are as incomprehensible to us as they are to the mumbling auditioners—just as incomprehensible as they were in 1989.
Incomprehension is a central element of Botea’s project, particularly in the actual inability for the students to speak or understand Romanian. Yet when trauma is defined as that which is unspeakable, language could be a deterrent to apprehension. Our belief in language, in the translatability between before and after trauma, may be that which prevents us from ever realizing it. Reconciling untranslatability is part of the historian’s task. Writing in the middle voice does not mean we submit ourselves entirely to the past. It is difference that gives time. Difference is the condition of history’s possibility. Broaching the congruence of the middle voice with difference highlights the value of the middle voice in writing a history that acts simultaneously in the past and the present. It offers a history that is doubled-over, revealing the cracks and rifts inherent within (Figure 6).

In Botea’s reenactment, we often find the students fumbling over a phrase; in one scene, they inquire after its pronunciation. Alongside them, thousands of Romanians are gathered. Their chanting is clear, articulate, unmistakable: they are demanding the truth. But the truth of the Romanian revolution is difficult to deliver. Of the series of 1989 revolutions against communist rule, the Romanian was the most violent, resulting in, according to official sources, 1,104 people killed and 3,552 wounded. The violence, was, and remains, largely inscrutable. Peter Siani-Davies writes, “Many Romansians still feel that the full story has not been told and the accusations and counter-accusations that continue to flow have only deepened the sense that something must be hidden.” The sense of secrecy is exacerbated by the bureaucratic structures governing information access. In a recent article evaluating the role of the television broadcast in the revolution Andreea Maierean reports, “The ‘Multimedia Archive’ of Romanian Television declined my request to access the original tapes, with the explanation that their space was under reconstruction and the material could not be found.” Nevertheless, even if all the material were available, a clear picture of the revolution cannot be had. This is what Botea’s project most vividly demonstrates: the obscurity that is built into the event itself.

Absence was part of the Romanian Revolution from the outset. During Ceausescu’s last official speech, mentioned above, when things began to go awry, cameramen were directed to film the sky, introducing broad swaths of blankness into a critical moment of transposition. The television went off air, and in recovered footage we hear only Ceausescu screaming for calm against a backdrop of audible unrest. Re-watching this scene quickly and visibly gets to the heart of the difficulties in amassing evidence and writing revolution. Nonappearance is imported directly into the center of the event; its core is ultimately hollow and the figure arrives after, always already too late. This is the sublime moment of history, the presentation of the unpresentable: trauma slips away from us at the very instant of its inauguration, but its shadow is left behind. The Romanian Revolution literalized what Derrida finds to be the condition of every event, that its meaning is always deferred, and the “first time” never arrives.
Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost... Is there, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a hauntology.

There is no original to consult with, no moment of pure presence that might be recuperated. Because it never fully was, as Faulkner knew: “the past is never dead, it's not even past.” This conclusion, which is in agreement with the psychoanalytic perception of traumatic experience as always deferred, provides the premise on which Botea’s work operates. For the Romanian revolution hadn’t fully happened-still hasn’t fully happened-when she created Auditions for a Revolution, allowing her work to occupy a position alongside the trauma without overwriting it. Her work is an impression of a trace, the semblance of a shadow. Every moment is redoubled, rife with différence. We do not only need to protect the trauma against forgetting. We need a way to open it, to listen to the voice that cries out from the wound. Derrida suggests “beyond empathy, différence is a process of opening to the Other.” Here, the Other is the ghost of the past that haunts us.

The writing of trauma can make one world-weary. It can seem indeterminate, endless, futile, failed. Yet repetition also makes way for difference. The generalization, crisis, and excess of the middle voice is, in Botea’s work, held in check by irony. The students’ obstinate inability to pronounce the revolution can be read as a critical gesture made in the face of trauma. In Ankersmit’s discussion of White, he identifies irony as “the trope that confronts us with the limitations and shortcomings of the other tropes; it is, so to speak, the trope that is the natural ally of historical reality itself and that enables it to reassert its rights against the pressure of other tropes.”

The strength of Auditions is its humor, its opening onto irony. Irony allows us to cut through the padding that typically accompanies a retelling of trauma, the tissued layers of apology, guilt, resolution. It facilitates a stepping-aside so as to allow the trauma to appear and thus offers a modern response to trauma, one that takes a realistic view of our inability to create an exhaustive report. An ironic response knows we can never speak authentically about trauma; it knows we are always conversing with a phantom. Irony doesn’t mean, however, that we evade or forget. Irony in the middle voice marries irony to responsibility; it points the way forward in addressing traumatic events without reducing them to what is knowable.

We’ve come to what would perhaps be considered the final scene, if there were an end to revolution. This one does not figure in Botea’s work. At the execution of Ceausescu and his wife, the video recording again lapsed. This is explained as follows: “It is said that the execution squad was so nervous at the prospect of the approaching Securitate forces that gunmen shot the Ceausescus immediately after
leading them outside, not giving the cameraman time to aim his camera. Although the sound of the machine gun fire was recorded, the cameraman could only manage to focus on the two corpses seconds after the gunfire ceased.”23 This moment, or non-moment, was given its own re-enactment in the 2009 Die letzten Tage der Ceausescu’s by German director Milo Rau.24 Rau makes substantial claims for the “authenticity” of his re-enactment, citing “video documents” and “witness accounts.”25 His tone seems to suggest he is offering a replacement for a lost moment, correctly delivering a self-evident resolution.

Rau’s re-enactment demonstrates a demand for something of substance to fill the void left by trauma, our own mal d’archives. His gesture parallels that of the historian, who assembles his data, building upon the presumed solidity of things like “video documents” and “witness accounts.” In making the archive the guarantor of our history, we’ve confused the prosthesis with the body proper, and overlooked the logic of the supplement, the law that holds the archive in place. Botea’s work, in contrast, looks directly at the conditions that allow us to know the event. She draws our attention to the gaps in this information, and to the illegibility of what is there. Rather than writing an account, she works to address its absences. Being attuned to traces, leaving room for untranslatability, embracing incompletion: these are ways of learning to speak with the ghost.
1 Born in Ploiesti, Romania, Botea studied art at Bucharest University and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She works in digital video, film, video installation, performance, and photography. A major exhibition of her work was held at the Jeu de Paume, Paris in 2009. More information is available at http://www.irinabotea.com; an excerpt of Auditions for a Revolution can be found at http://www.irinabotea.com/pages/auditions_for_a_revolution.html.


5 “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation” was initially delivered as a keynote at the “Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’” Conference at UCLA in 1990 and published with the proceedings. A revised version was later published in Figural Realism, that is the version cited here. See also White’s 1992 essay “Writing in the Middle Voice”, in The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957–2007 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 254-262.

6 White, Figural Realism, 39.


8 Ankersmit, “Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians,” History and Theory 37, no. 2 (1 May 1998), 189.

9 The original insert read as follows: “Les désastres qui marquent cette fin de millénaire, ce sont aussi des archives du mal: dissimulées ou détruites, interdites, détournées, refoulées. Leur traitement est à la fois massif et raffiné au cours de guerres civiles ou internationales, de manipulations privées ou officielles.”


12 Caruth, Unclaimed Experience, 3.


14 White, Figural Realism, 52.

15 Ankersmit, “Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians,” 193.

16 Centre Georges Pompidou and Christine Macel, Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe (Zurich; Paris: JRP/Ringier; in co-edition with Centre Pompidou, 2010), 88.

17 The BBC, however, notes, “The final figure on the numbers of those who died during the demonstration in December 1989 was placed as being closer to 100 than the thousands predicted.” The gross discrepancy in figures only heightens the lack of clarity as to the nature of events. “On This Day: 25 December,” accessed 16 December 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/25/newsid_2524000/25242624.stm.


22 Ankersmit, “Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians,” 188.


25 Rau, “Die Letzten Tage der Ceausescus.”
Imagine no buildings. In the United States pavilion of this year’s Venice Architecture Biennial, one is confronted by a roomful of banners suspended from the ceiling, vaguely resembling the rainbow-colored flags used for gay parades and, with ‘peace’ or Italian ‘pace’ in the middle, as protest against the American military involvement in Iraq and elsewhere (Figure 1). Under the title Spontaneous Interventions, the Institute for Urban Design in New York under the curatorship of Cathy Lang Ho (with co-curators David van der Leer and Ned Cramer) interpreted the overarching theme of the Biennial, Common Ground, as a provocation to openly embrace the grass roots of architecture: they presented community-based projects ranging from urban farms to imaginative playgrounds and ‘guerilla’ seizures of public space as unassuming as a chalked-in bike lane and as prominent (and predictable, in this context) as Occupy Wall Street. Through an open call, the curators chose 124 projects from over 500 submissions: these, belonging genuinely in the communities in which they intervene, were described (one might as well say publicized) in the Biennial contribution in a standard format that suited some projects better, but did a noble job of treating them all equally. What was in fact spread out in time and space—many projects are ongoing—was brought together by clever design (by M-A-D, Erika Adigard and Patricia McShane) and placement of content. The color stripes on the verso of the banners were coded to stand for six recurring concerns and their weight within the individual project: “community” (by far the dominant factor), information, accessibility, economy, sustainability and yes, pleasure. On the front of the banners, facts were organized in six groups. A pie chart repeating the color distribution on the back (the scientistic presentation of such ‘facts’ as the relative importance of pleasure in a project is, one hopes, tongue in cheek; the listed percentages are due to the entrants). Besides this we were told the amount of money, time frame, and manpower used, a ‘problem’ blurb (“need for urban guidance”), and a ‘solution’ blurb (from the same project: “covert advice and warnings for modern-day digital nomads.”) In addition, a very brief paragraph made the project comprehensible, with the aid of one photograph apiece.

All exhibited projects were US-based, which is less an intentional choice of the organizers than a practical and political necessity, as the pavilion is sponsored by the State Department. The building, owned by the Guggenheim, is in fact the only private structure in the Giardini, the Venetian park wherein the national pavilions
are housed. The result was something like an alternate portrait of the United States, not as the aggressive giant much of the world imagines or fears, but as a multifaceted entity defined by community organizers, small business owners, art projects untainted by institutional backing, and subversive flash gatherings. Put together as a statement about the United States or architecture, if not as individual projects, it added up to a somewhat urgent message that there is more to this country than capitalism, bombs, and housing crises. And poverty. These clichéd attributes are of course all too real and have an impact on the work in the show—that many Americans live in poverty, material and cultural, is a fact that vegetable trucks and urban farmers know too well—but the lifeblood of the exhibition, what made it so polarizing and provocative beside the tame discussions of ‘common ground among architects’ elsewhere in the Biennial, is the dynamism of citizens organizing change. In the US pavilion of the Venice Architecture Biennial, there were no buildings. People took their place at the center of the exhibition’s focus.

The exhibition as a whole, in contrast with its component projects, seeked to ‘commonize’ these heterogeneous efforts for better living in the city, to make them somehow fit on one (however panoramic) page. The city was a common theme almost by default—rural living is as urgently in crisis, but the city seems the last tenuous link between the projects and architecture or (“urban”) planning as traditionally conceived, so the only kind of activist farms we get are urban farms. Fair enough. The formal approach, visible in the crisp graphics and elegantly installed banners, pointed towards a deeper tension: such a ‘power-point-style’ implementation is conceivable in an executive conference room, serving to determine today’s easy solutions to complex and often irremediable problems. This ostensibly corporate style of presentation differs strikingly from the often messy, do-it-yourself expressionism of much activist material culture. This aesthetic is by no means unique—Victor Burgin among others has for years advocated a smooth ‘professionalized’ visual style for political art—but it comes as a bit of a shock applied to projects that have no budget for graphic design. I dwell on this design issue not just because it was the most conspicuous physical manifestation of the US Biennial exhibition, with its insistent reference to things taking place elsewhere: there is more to this corporate elegance than meets the eye. It is the fragile bridge between an idealistic grass-roots approach and a larger world economy driven by financial, not ethical and aesthetic motives, and of local pitfalls of gentrification and privatization that plague even the best-meaning community activism. This placement of the “good guys”, the bike enthusiasts and freeware hackers and soup-cooking soil scientists, in a “bad world” that certainly exists, seems to me the strength of the exhibition design, accomplished subtly, by example rather than preaching.

Then again, given the breadth of the material on display, the limited attention span, and even more limited interest for American everyday life of the average Biennial visitor, the design might itself be just the kind of corporate quick fix to a challenging...
Figure 1 *Spontaneous Interventions* installation view.

Figure 2 ICE-POPS (Interested Critical Explorers of Privately-Owned Public Space), online.

Figure 3 *Spontaneous Interventions*, Interboro installation.
problem that it presents its projects as being. Whether the compact, sleek, even beautiful design really means all it seems to—or whether it is an instance of ironic self-effacement by curators uncomfortable with their place in a commodity economy—is hard to tell. In fact, it might be all these things, a feeling strengthened by the courageous decision not to choose a very small number of projects, which, for all the gain in legibility, would have thus become emblematic representatives of their type (the park, the healthy food store, the app for ‘urban nomads’, the brilliantly resourced outdoors living room). Instead, there were sometimes repetitive ‘solutions’ to similar, but never identical problems throughout the United States; common ground thus emerged unbidden as a statement of common wishes and efforts, of strong strands of people claiming their “Right to the City.”

This slogan of the 1960s, and of Henri Lefebvre’s activist-inspired urban theory, could stand as a motto for the show. But it would raise more questions than it answers. Whose right to the city? If everyone’s, what guarantees that these rights don’t conflict? The projects and the curatorial approach of Ho and the Institute suggest a broad view of the ‘common’, from the visible documents of collaborative work to the ‘commons’ by which Marxist geographers like David Harvey judge urban political needs and their fulfillment: air, water, health and social resources, that must be sustained and fairly distributed. Though it is sometimes forgotten today, this motif goes back to a nearly mythic emphasis on Marx: the great pressure put in Das Kapital on the fencing in of public pastures in Britain as a first blast in the making of the proletariat. From this urban ‘Fall’ there is no direct path back to Eden, but today’s urban activism—and theoretical criticism—sees more hope in piecemeal reclamation of commons broadly construed than in centralized revolution. In the US, the privatization of public space, a problem nearly everywhere in the world, may be farthest progressed: and so many projects show the reclaiming of shopping malls and office building plazas by small interventions, such as the tearing out of unwanted asphalt parking lots, and the guided tours offered by ICE-POPS (Interested Critical Explorers of Privately Owned Public Space) in various cities (Figure 2).

A self-consciously acknowledged historical precursor for the curators was the Situationist International (abbreviated SI, just like their Spontaneous Interventions), with its aim to disrupt capitalist domination of the city through walking and other ephemeral acts. A timeline on the floor vaguely resembled the ‘psychogeographic’ maps the Situationists produced on the basis of these ‘aimless’ and ‘unproductive’ (thus, they would claim, anti-capitalist; Lefebvre has made some mordant comments on the privileged background of Guy Debord and its effects on his idea of unproductivity) walks. The timeline, however, was very un-Situationist in its chronological progress: it showed the development of the city from the Neolithic to the present, highlighting political, historical, but also cultural events, from the Paris Commune to the introduction of the Zipcar car-sharing project and the naming of Ada Louise Huxtable as first full-time architecture critic of the New York Times (1963). The Situa-
tonists might serve as historical anchors (and one of the projects is a “derive app”), but there were more obvious differences than similarities: a few projects subscribe to the belief that a purely symbolic or esthetic intervention can change people’s minds and thus the city, but most are very pragmatic. They are planned, not spontaneous the way a riot might be, they are down-to-earth, and many were probably very welcome in their communities, but might, in an international presentation, seem like so much public relations for the American city. In the presentation, they both won and lost: they won, as they showed the range of possibilities to change the environment, and, in particular because the amount of money and labor needed were presented directly, they allowed a good comparison of how much can be done with how much (or little) investment. “Most of these projects do not attempt any revolution”, curator Ho said when I interviewed her, and in fact, many of them seemed humble. Another disclaimer Ho made both in her presentation and in the informal interview was that in the particular situation of the US, the idea of public space is very different from that in Europe. There was, she claimed, no natural “café-culture,” and a guerilla bike path painted on the street and used by guerilla bikers seems a serious challenge to the public order. The coffeehouse is one of Jürgen Habermas’s historical exemplars in his seminal 1962 book on the emergence of ‘publicness’ and it marked a high point of concreteness in his narrative: a place of political exchange outside the framework of state power, though firmly within a national economy. One can argue about the details of this transformation, and its links to actual places and social practices (coffee houses and similar locales were notoriously closed to women, who tried to ban them), but the appeal to concrete places and actions is shared by the US Pavilion.

Besides the international public of the exhibition and the readers of a special issue of the journal Architect, which aptly serves as catalogue, multiple events every day framed the exhibition. Lectures and round tables were announced in the final room of the exhibition on hand-written sheets of paper pasted to the wall (thus oddly resembling specials at a restaurant) and took place in a seating area outside, made out of the wood panels used for stilted walkways when Venice floods. Besides this there were orange seating cubes that could be carried and arranged at will (Figure 3). The wood panels will go back to the city and the seating cubes will be donated to a local school. One could imagine this meeting space itself making the list of 124. In contrast to the enormous tent opposite, in which renowned experts spoke from a podium, the little agora in front of the pavilion was nicely modest, with speakers, respondents and audience lounging in the cubes, inviting immediate responses and questions from the audience—a meeting place for discussion and the seeking of common ground, not revolutionary perhaps, but consistent with the idea that what we really need is global communication about local issues, whose interest is in turn global because we are all local somewhere.
Imagine, an archive. Perhaps this concern with deep as opposed to dramatic change also drove the first exhibition of new MoMA architecture curator Pedro Gadanho. 

9+1 Ways of Being Political: 50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design, in the museum’s third floor galleries, is on view until March 2013. The show fed on the MoMA collection and archive, but it treated it as raw material for potential political revelation. The exhibition was organized in roughly chronological order around ten stations ranging from well-known urbanist experiments under the rubrics “Radical Stances, 1961-73”—#1, featuring Buckminster Fuller, Peter Cook, Cedric Price, and others—and “Fiction and Dystopia: 1963-1978”—#2, featuring Rem Koolhaas’s 1972 Exodus project—(Figure 4) to the more grassroots activism of “Occupying Social Borders: 1974-2011” (#8) and “Interrogating Shelter: 1971-2003” (#9).

Apart from the expected and indeed practically inevitable participants, some of the most impressive projects exhibited were interventions in public space that are barely intelligible under the euphemistic subtitle “urban design.” Here the symbolic ambiguity of the first part of the title, with the arithmetic of the ‘9+1’ suggesting more constructive histories of public space in the shadow of New York’s experience and mythology of 9-11 (pointedly, the show opened on 12 September 2012), was a more reliable guide to the often unpredictable relation between the show’s components and canonical architecture and urbanism. Didier Faustino’s Stairway to Heaven—2002, in section #8—(Figure 5) for example is an aggressive anti-monument in a Portuguese park, a concrete Brutalist staircase that we are supposed to take over, letting the massive architecture conspire with our presence in public space. Section #5, “Performing Public Space: 1978-2011”, included among others a model of Jürgen Mayer H.’s Metropol Parasol in Seville, made prominent by its importance in recent political demonstrations. Apropos: I’ve heard Jürgen Mayer H. lecture on the project in the fall of 2011, at the height of the demonstrations, without mentioning this use of the space; when prompted by the audience, he voiced delight with the publicity while disclaiming any political intent. Also in Section #5 were classic performances such as Vito Acconci’s Following Piece, in which the artist decided to follow a person until he or she went into a private property—thus putting pressure on the intersection of the public and private, the built environment and bodies acting in it. Just as interesting are Ai Weiwei’s “Studies of Perspective” (1995-2003) in the section “Iconoclasm and Institutional Critique: 1964-2003,” in which the artist’s middle finger is used to, well, “put in perspective” or in other words to evaluate, public buildings (Figure 6).

It will be noticed that New York City itself does not play a perpetual role in this survey of architectural activism, though, in a gesture of color-coded Utopianism reminiscent of Venice, Jason Crum’s 1969 Project for a Painted Wall, New York City, New York. Perspective presents a geometric abstract phoenix rising from gray urban photographic ashes, a fitting homage both to the MoMA’s modernism and to the rather formalist politics of the 1960s avant-garde (think of Dan Flavin’s Tatlin works). Most telling might be the inclusion of Diller and Scofidio’s Wall of 2003: during the renovation of the MoMA midtown venue, they dismantled one of the white walls...
Figure 4 Rem Koolhaas (Dutch, born 1944) and Elia Zenghelis (British, born Greece 1937) with Madelon Vriesendorp (Dutch, born 1945) and Zoe Zenghelis (British, born Greece 1937), *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*

*The Reception Area, project,*
1972. Gelatin silver photograph with color ink, 10 1/2 x 14 1/2" (26.7 x 36.8 cm).

Figure 5 Didier Faustino (French, born Portugal, 1968), *Stairway to Heaven,* 2002. Photograph on baryt paper, 22 1/16 x 29 1/2" (56 x 75 cm).
and reinstalled it at the Whitney, only to have it slowly destroyed by a mechanized screwdriver on a custom scaffold. It is this self-reflexivity on the political role of museums that is most interesting in the show—changing the world one tree at a time is not in the style of MoMA, however activist the curating. Such self-examination is not just balance or leavened, but in fact thrives on some of the expected, in every sense canonical material that dominates the earlier segments of the exhibition. Gadanho himself is a new type of curator and maybe himself the best example of a reflective approach to power he showcases. He blogs, he tweets, in various media he lets us partake in his framing of ‘performative architecture’ and the process of exhibition making, and, consonant with his theses, he gives lectures about the role he plays in a major institution.

In Venice, we saw current projects archivally documented in the space of the pavilion, while the space itself was given over to communal encounter; at MoMA, it is the archive that was set into a contemporary perspective, pointedly without catalogue, which makes the event character of the exhibition more urgent and might reflect a similar attitude of focusing on the exhibition as encounter, with a claim to political actuality. Gadanho works to activate the archive, but let there be no doubt: this is the MoMA, and we see drawings, plans, collages, models, photographs, and videos neatly framed in thematic clusters. The ‘activist’ part remains largely abstract: the design plays with a propagandistic aesthetic (with red, stenciled letters on the wall) and we are tightly guided through the numerically ordered stations. Despite this, one had the sneaking suspicion that the categories, however appropriate, worked against the politics of the individual works: a more pitilessly egalitarian layout, as in Venice, or perhaps a dogmatically chronological scheme may well have conveyed the shock of history better than reflected art-historical categories.

That said, we have to consider the orientation of the show’s politics, which is aimed at the institution as much as at the world outside. Gadanho is not insisting that there is political architecture—of course there is—but that inside the bowels of MoMA itself we find politics. The last sections of the show might be where Venice and New York come closest, with Gadanho insisting on art’s utopian or dystopian power: David Goldblatt’s photographs and the wonderful video *Ikea Disobedients*, a performance making public the domestic sphere (and exposing its domination by certain companies) by Spanish Andrés Jaque Arquitectos | Office for Political Innovation, prominently celebrated as the first instance of performance art the architecture department at MoMA has ever purchased. In fact, it was purchased to be featured in this show. The emphasis on the archive might not only serve as self-assuring proof that there always were politics at MoMA, but as a sign that the MoMA architecture collection may look different in ten years. These acquisitions are a glimpse of what we might expect of Gadanho in the future. This spells hope for a fresh, inventive and political course at MoMA in the years to come.
EPILOGUE
“Why don’t you have an asshole?” Vich asked Nigaug. Nigaug, serious and in a slow drawn-out tone, proceeded as if listing simple street directions to a foreign tourist.

“Overseas, when they piss, they press a small button, when they shit they press a bigger one. I believe this is called ‘sustainability’ in older systems. After the Revolution, we radicalized these amateurish attempts. We decided there will be only one, the pissing button. And, so you see, we needed to redesign.”

When Nigaug referred to Tahitian post-Revolutionary society he called it the "new system." And it was certainly a radical redesign of all that was familiar to Vich, to the level of the orifice. Vich did not completely understand all the decisions. Why were their eyelids upside down? Why did they flex their ears as they spoke? Why was their skin tone slightly lime-green in color? Yet most things could be deciphered as methods for reducing the trace of their physical existence. For example, Tahitians had small feet because they desired to leave a small footprint. They harboured a strong hatred of foods that produced an “upset emission state.” And, as Vich was starting to understand, all this was not a matter of efficiency, like in the older systems. After the Revolution, it became a matter of taste. Of beauty, if you wish. The evolution of the species would be accomplished by design. The point was to create a state in which both pulsations of the heart and upside-down blinking eyelids would point toward the sky and harmonize with the pulsations of the Cosmos.

But, in order to grasp the entire situation properly, Vich needed more guidance from Nigaug. The entire conversation about the asshole was related to the reason that Vich had landed on the island: his acute state of diarrhoea, which made his asshole irritable, and which made him irritated. So irritated, in fact, that he demanded that the plane which he had boarded in China, immediately land in Tahiti, as he smuggled expired Benperidol, an anti-psychotic medicine treating both schizophrenia and anti-social sexual impulses, for an unassuming client in the US.

Upon being dropped off, he was inspected by pleasant, jovial men who were the only law-enforcing officials that he encountered on the island. This brush with the law was far from unpleasant. The men took Vich to a beach with sand like talcum powder where he swam and lay in the sun. Then they had him relax under a tree populated by a thousand parakeets and three nubile young girls. Vich tanned quickly, whistled at the parakeets, and seemed to enjoy being wet and dirty, especially in the presence of the three girls. A short bald man told him he “integrates quite well into the system.”

So there was potential. And they sent Nigaug Laup the Third to explain a couple of things.

“You see,” said Nigaug, “we cannot radically redesign you because of your old age. But you do have some potential. The Committee has agreed that you can use the small button twice. But we have to do something about your emissions.”

“What emissions?” “Come on, you did fart.” “Luckily, we have exterminated beans and other gas-inducing foods long ago, so you will just have to wait and bear with me.”

As strange as this whole situation was, Vich was not eager to leave the sandy beach and the
translucent sea, and his tree with parakeets, and
definitely not, the three nubile naked girls next to
him. But he needed to learn the ropes.

“As we are waiting, can you tell me a couple of
things? Where am I? Where does this come from?
And where do I go from here?”

“It is strange that you say that,” Nigaug grinned.
“My great-grandfather, Nigaug Laup Senior, who
was, I must say, the father of at least 1,000,000
members in this system, including some para-
keets, a couple of goats, and plenty of old-style
bacteria, asked the same questions. When he
left us, we were perplexed. And that is when we
started pondering what needs to be done, how we
can turn things around and start to design.”

Nigaug began the story of design. When Nigaug
Senior left, the system in Tahiti was extremely
fertile: bugs, bacteria, fish, dogs, and the humans.
The animals fucked so much and kept procreating,
that they produced too many bad versions of
themselves that were continuously shitting and
breathing. The island was about to explode. When
pondering Senior’s question: “Where am I going?”
the Royal Foundation concluded that he left the
island to go Overseas to pursue a solution to the
eruption. He could not find it in the island, and
he could not enlist the help of islanders. That is
probably why he called them “primitive.” So the
islanders decided not to be primitive any more.
They decided to be what Nigaug called “avant-
garde,” to lead the organisms of the world on the
Revolutionary path to a New Paradise.

The first rather obvious thing to do was to
eliminate sex. The unbridled desire for fucking
exhibited by the Tahitian flora and fauna was what
most disappointed Senior. He must have been in
a shock when he discovered that he had already
fathered 1,000,000 souls. He must have been
shocked by lasciviousness and the overpopulation
that he had produced. This must have been it.
Ashamed, Tahitians banned sex and established
a Committee in order to enforce this ban. As the
Committee grew more powerful, they realized
that reproduction was not the only biological act
that needed to be brought to a standstill. Irritation
emissions and the emission of mating calls needed
to be decreased to zero as well. This was the
origin of the plan for a systematic approach to the
problem of building the New Paradise. Not only
sex, but also all forms of bodily emissions would
be brought to zero! Waste was the ornament of a
bygone era.

Vich looked at the three nubile girls with great
sadness and disappointment, realizing that they
were not going to fuck him. And the reason that
they are fanning him using their feet had some-
thing to do with the statutes of the Committee.
“Please continue,” he said, hoping to find a loop-
hole. But instead of finding a loophole, he learned
that he had too many holes.

“Advised by the Committee, the Localization
Ministry decided that it was not enough to ban
sex, we had to eliminate orifices. Redesign has
five points: 1. No holes for breathing 2. No holes
for eating. 3. No holes for shitting or farting. 4. No
holes for fucking. 5. Ornament is crime.”

“Ornament is crime does not logically follow.”

“I know, that is a leftover from old pagan tradi-
tion, but useful in the elimination of things that we
do not like. The idea comes from the pre-Revolu-
tionary father-spirit Sool."

It turned out that Sool, from somewhere Oversees, was a prophet for the elimination of things that were primitive. He was a hunchback, they said, who spoke with a lisp. He often sat in judgment of things that found trivial or outmoded, and not because they were inefficient but simply because they were not to his taste—he would call such things "ornaments." Vich realized that in this cosmology there was no sense of reason for the banishment of things; all decisions related to what would be left in the past were given as edicts. The asshole was deemed an ornament and it was promptly removed. The result was as lovely as it was pure.

"But let me explain about the orifices," Niguag continued. "we do not breathe through the nose. We are only allowed to pick it to remove waste, so that we have a better sense of smell. We use mouths only for talking, we chew with our ears." He went on to explain the absence of pussies. He did so with great enthusiasm, as he considered this design to be truly brilliant. The elimination of fucking holes not only makes sex impossible, it made procreation impossible as well. No more embarrassment and no more bad versions of oneself. He further explained that the elimination of orifices was enacted upon all species, not only the old humans. Suddenly, Vich realized that he had experienced one of the many virtues offered by the absence of assholes: While sitting under a tree populated with the beautiful parakeets for nearly the whole day, he hadn't once been shit on, not even once.

Niguag went on to explain in detail many other features of creature design, including self-cleaning. Vich immediately recalled what he thought was a day-dream induced by the heat of the sun on the beach: He now remembered that at one point he had clearly seen a Tahitian stretch out his tongue and lick his legs. Niguag went on to talk about the Localization Ministry, the only lawmaking body on the island, which emerged from the system and ruled the island by design with the simple demand to be "poetic, creative, imaginative, and wealthy" and to defend the strict localization of everything, guided by the motto: "ORGANISMS OF THE WORLD, LOCALIZE!"

The meaning of this these mottoes was not really clear to Vich, but Niguag's discourse enlightened him on two points.

First, he realized why everyone on Tahiti was tattooed. This had something to do with the prophet Sool who had claimed that the tattoo was primitive and needed to be eliminated. After much deliberation, however, the Localization Ministry overturned this edict because tattoos were deemed the most local form of art—there was no need to import, export or store any art if images could be carried on the body. Like all other forms of elimination, the physical artwork could be eliminated, and with it, so too could the burdensome museums that housed these objects.

He also understood at this point the ways in which the flora and fauna of Tahiti were kept in a stable state despite the absence of procreation. As it turned out, the news of redesign spread Overseas. "People often came carrying books with icons painted by Senior, wanting to live on the island. Senior was, wherever he was, we reckoned, sending us money through them, as they would always come with lots of money. This was our only contact with Overseas, since we do not pollute the world with our offspring (filthy!) or with our products (immoral!). These people really wanted to be part of our localized world, and they were bringing all the world's wealth into the system. We used that wealth to redesign them and to make them part of us. And we also used that wealth to redesign their animals, for each always had to bring two with him. The rest goes to the Animal Compacting Facility, powered by the wings of parakeets."

"Wait," I said. "So you guys are immigrants, or, shall I call you ex-pats, since that is, I believe a name for a rich immigrant. And there is no procreation. So how come you are Senior's great
grandson if Tahitians do not have sex?"

“Oh, it is a matter of design. Senior left some pictures of us, masterpieces of local art, and those have been transferred to the bodies of islanders. We use them as templates for redesign: we are all designed after Senior’s pictures. And if some creatures are not depicted in Senior’s pictures, we reproduce them in the same style.” Niagug pulled up his shirt and revealed a picture tattooed on his belly. “I believe these icons were once hung in museums, but since we no longer produce anything, we hand-copy them in miniature and carry them with us on our bodies. We are all, as the Ministry says “creative, poetic, imaginative, wealthy” and all carriers of the wealth of art. We realized that the need to localize art as well, so we only copied what already exists on the island. I know of several dozens of such icons. They are copies of copies of copies of Senior’s pictures. Look at this one: this one served as a basis for my design and the design of my brother.” He showed Vich the bottom of his tongue.

Vich, who had to take four painful years of art history in an Eastern European high school, found some resemblance between the image and a painting of some modernist French painter who travelled to Tahiti ages ago. Except that the creatures in the image were lime green, had their eyelids upside down, curiously upturned ears, and were pictured picking their noses. He looked at other examples. Animals were, of course, all lime green, and it was even better than in the Frenchman’s pictures: there was a fantastic contrast between the colour of their skin and the fashion sense that graced every picture: some Gucci loafers, a Missoni sweater, or a Zegna coat.

This conversation would have gone on and on, hadn’t Vich gotten another attack of diarrhoea. While on the toilet, he thought about how at this point he would prefer not having an asshole. And then he thought about how maybe he would prefer not having sex either, if the three girls would just fondle him all day long. But becoming lime green?

That was a bit too much. And where do I wash my hands? I can’t find a single sink with these self-licking people.

Before he could answer this question, a Committee member came looking for him. They had a conversation.

“We thought we could integrate and design you. But that is not possible.”

“It is not that you are too old for design. You are actually not rich enough. You cannot pay for it. Sorry. We really like you.”

“Why? What is the matter?” said Vich, not even sure that was a bad thing.

“We looked at the Benperidol in your suitcases. It would be invaluable for achieving our goal of banning sex. We could eliminate it without banning!”

“Yes?”

“You know it is beyond expiry date. It is time for you to return Overseas.”

“I tried it myself!”

“Of course.”
CONTRIBUTORS

SIMONE BROTT
Simone Brott is Coordinator of History and Theory at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. She holds a masters from Yale School of Architecture in the History Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Urbanism, and a PhD in Architecture from The University of Melbourne, Australia. She is undertaking a study on architecture, modernity, and fascism, and is the author of “Esprit Futur,” Log 23 and Architecture for a Free Subjectivity: Deleuze and Guattari at the Horizon of the Real (Ashgate, 2011).

DIANE E. DAVIS
Diane E. Davis is Professor of Urbanism and Development at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. Her published works examine the relations between urbanization and national development, the politics of urban development policy, and conflict cities. Her most recent book, Cities and Sovereignty: Identity Conflicts in the Urban Realm (Indiana University Press, 2011), examines the interplay of ethno-national conflict, space, and governance. A prior recipient of fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Heinz Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the United States Institute for Peace, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Davis now coordinates a large scale project titled Urban Resilience in Situations of Chronic Violence funded by USAID.

ARINDAM DUTTA
Arindam Dutta is Associate Professor of Architectural History at MIT Architecture. He is the author of The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility (New York: Routledge, 2007), and is currently working on a book titled Sahmat 1989-2009: The Liberal Arts in the Liberalized Public Sphere.

ANDRÉS ESTEFAINE
Andrés Estefane is a PhD student in the Department of History at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He was a CONICYT Scholar (2008-2012) and has a BA in History from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His research deals with the links between bureaucracy, local power, and the production of state knowledge from a historical perspective, as well as the relationship between politics, history and memory in contemporary Latin America. Since March 2012 he works as a researcher at the Center for the Study of Political History and is Associate Professor at the School of Government in the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Santiago, Chile.

BRITT EVERSOLE
Britt Eversole holds a Master of Architecture and a Master of Environmental Design from Yale University, and was the Walter B. Sanders Visiting Fellow in Architecture at the University of Michigan in 2008-2009. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Princeton University School of Architecture. His dissertation, “The Disenchantment with Democracy: Architectural Models of Creative Self-Organization,” rereads the aspirations and problems in Italian architectural experimentation and
theorization in realizing a post-fascist democracy. He hypothesizes that Italy’s “difficult democracy” offers an index for exploring the complex intersections of Italian politics and architecture, whereas architectural and urban theory provide an instrument for studying the aporias and limits of democracy itself.

**DAVID GISSEN**
David Gissen is a historian, theorist, critic and curator of architecture and urbanism. His recent work focuses on developing a novel concept of nature in architectural thought and developing experimental forms of architectural historical practice. He is associate professor of Architecture at CCA, where he coordinates the history and theory curriculum and a new post-graduate concentration in emerging scholarly practices.

**ROBIN ADÈLE GREELEY**
Robin Adèle Greeley is Associate Professor of Art History and Latin American Studies at the University of Connecticut, where she focuses on modern and contemporary art. She is a research associate at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, where since 2009 she has co-directed the Art Forum speaker series on art and politics in contemporary Latin America. Recent books include *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2006); the co-edited *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (University of California Press, 2012); and, forthcoming, *Between Campesino and State: Photography, Rurality and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Yale University Press).

**KENNETH IP**
Kenneth Ip is an architect currently practising in Hong Kong. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies (History, Theory and Criticism) from the University of Toronto and a Master of Architecture from the University of Hong Kong. He is the co-founder of JOKE, a medium for architectural observation, research and design (www.jokearchitects.com). Much of his research is on the idea of architecture beyond mere form, particularly in its effects on the urban environment. His current projects include exploring the relationship between consumptive mass media and architecture, post-colonial politics and the city, and the post-WWII developments of architectural theory.

**ANDRÉS JAQUE AND THE OFFICE FOR POLITICAL INNOVATION**
Andrés Jaque and the Office for Political Innovation explore the potential of post-foundational politics and symmetrical approaches to the sociology of technology to rethink architectural practices. The office’s motto is ‘architecture is technologically rendered society’ and is currently devoted to the study of connected domesticities like politically-activated urbanism. They are authors of *Everyday Politics* (COAM, 2011) and *Eco-Ordinary: Codes for everyday architectural practices* (Lampreave, 2011). Their architectural production has been broadly published and exhibited, and was recently acquired by MoMA. Jaque has been Tessenow Stipendiat in Alfred Toepfer Stiftung FVS, visiting teacher in a number of international universities, and has lectured throughout the world.
MARK JARZOMBEK
Mark Jarzombek is Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture and Associate Dean at the MIT School of Architecture and Planning. He has an architecture diploma from the ETH and a PhD from the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Art program at MIT. He has published widely on numerous topics and has been a fellow at CASVA, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Canadian Center for Architecture, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. His books include the textbook *A Global History of Architecture* (Wiley Press, 2006) and *The Architecture of First Societies: A Global Perspective* (forthcoming: Wiley Press, 2013).

ATEYA KHORAKIWALA
Ateya Khorakiwala is a PhD candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She is interested in how India’s project of development and modernization in the 1960s and 70s transformed into an imperialist project. Her work looks at how the fixation on creating stable food-supply systems in India led to a biopolitical revolution to augment food production; she studies the infrastructure of storage and distribution that allowed the system to proliferate. She holds a Bachelor in Architecture from Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture, Mumbai, and a Master of Science in Architecture Studies from the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Art program at MIT.

TUNNEY LEE
Tunney Lee is Professor Emeritus of Architecture and City Planning MIT and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has a B.Arch from the University of Michigan and was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Rome. He has worked for Buckminster Fuller, I.M. Pei, Ulrich Franzen and others. He was Chief of Planning Design for the Boston Development Authority and the director of the Massachusetts Division of Capital Planning and Operations. His experience in citizen participation includes the Takoma School Charrette and the Copley Place Citizens Review Committee. He was Head of MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning and the founder of the Department of Architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. At present, he teaches a studio at MIT on sustainable neighborhoods in China. His research is in urban residential density and the planning history of Boston.

ANA MARÍA LEÓN
is a PhD candidate in the History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture at MIT. She has an architecture diploma from Universidad Católica de Guayaquil, a Master in Architecture from Georgia Tech, and a Master in Design Studies with distinction from the Harvard GSD. Her scholarly work traces the friction between design and political agendas, it has been published in *Log, thresholds, PLOT*, and *JAE*. She is currently working on her dissertation, which maps discussions on Surrealism, Freudian psychoanalysis, totalitarianism, and migration in Buenos Aires as they were represented in the housing projects of Catalan architect Antonio Bonet.
REINHOLD MARTIN
Reinhold Martin is Associate Professor of Architecture in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, where he directs the PhD program in architecture and the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture. He is also a member of Columbia’s Institute for Comparative Literature and Society and the Committee on Global Thought. Martin is a founding co-editor of the journal Grey Room. His most recent book is Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again (Minnesota, 2010).

MONTENEGRO AIRWAYS
Montenegro Airways is an international thinky-tank with offices in Los Angeles and Perth. The partners have designed a home addition for a pawnshop broker in New Haven and established Lumilab™ to continue research on a non-functioning glow-in-the-dark candy package. Most recently, they have developed some propaganda for cities designed on animal patterns. The two sole proprietors of Montenegro Airways, Michael Osman and Tijana Vujosevic, are highly versed in their trade. They both hold PhDs from the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Art program at MIT. At present they are being untrained by students at the University of California in Los Angeles and The University of Western Australia.

KELLY PRESUTTI
Kelly Presutti is a graduate student in the History, Theory and Criticism Department at MIT. She has previously written on strategies for exhibiting contemporary Eastern European art and considered the effects of biennial culture on artistic production in the region. Her work focuses on the unseen and the unsayable, both in Eastern Europe and nineteenth-century France. She holds a master’s degree in Art History and Criticism, with a focus on Art and Philosophy, from Stony Brook University, and a dual BA in Art History and Chemistry from DePauw University.

NASSER RABBAT
Nasser Rabbat is the Aga Khan Professor and the Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT. An architect and a historian, his scholarly interests include the history and historiography of Islamic architecture, art, and cultures, urban history, and post-colonial criticism. He has authored five books, edited or co-edited three books, and published more than eighty scholarly articles and book sections. He is currently completing an intellectual biography of the fifteenth-century historian al-Maqrizi, who wrote the first true urban history of Cairo.

PRASSANNA RAMAN
Prassanna Raman graduated in 2012 with a Master's degree in Architecture Studies (Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture) from MIT. Her research examines comparative economic development and violence through the built environment lens in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Her Master’s thesis explored the concept of urban resilience in conflict cities using the case study of the Orangi Pilot project in Karachi, Pakistan.
SANTIAGO CIRUGEDA AND RECETAS URBANAS

Recetas Urbanas (www.recetasurbanas.net) is an architecture collective founded and directed by Santiago Cirugeda. The group is based in Seville, Spain, and develops projects aimed at improving the social realm of the city. Their projects range from the systematic occupation of public space to the construction of building attachments, and usually operate by taking advantage of legal loopholes. They are currently collaborating with the larger network “arquitecturas colectivas” (www.arquitecturascolectivas.net), which offers information, methodologies, support, and the occasional cold beer to collectives, associations, or citizens in general that want to fight for the improvement of their communities.

NOMEDA URBONAS AND GEDIMINAS URBONAS

Nomeda Urbonas and Gediminas Urbonas are artists, educators, and co-founders of Urbonas Studio—an interdisciplinary research program that advocates for the reclamation of public culture in the face of overwhelming privatization, stimulating cultural and political imagination as tools for social change. Often beginning with archival research, their methodology unfolds complex participatory works investigating the urban environment, architectural developments, and cultural and technological heritage. Urbonas are co-founders of the Transaction Archive and co-directors of the Pro-test Lab Archive. Gediminas Urbonas is Associate Professor at the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology and Nomeda Urbonas is Act Fellow and PhD candidate at NTNU, Norway.

THÉRÈSE F. TIERNEY

Thérèse F. Tierney (arch.illinois.edu/URLab) is Assistant Professor of Architecture with a Designated Emphasis in New Media at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. As founding director of URL: Urban Research Lab, Tierney’s research explores the intersection of networked technologies and the built environment. She was a predoctoral researcher at the MIT Media Lab and a member of University of California Berkeley Center for New Media. Tierney is the author of The Public Space of Social Media: Connected Cultures of Network Society (Routledge, forthcoming 2013), Abstract Space: Beneath the Media Surface (Routledge, 2007), and co-editor with Anthony Burke of Network Practice: New Strategies for Architecture + Design (Princeton, 2007).

LAWRENCE VALE

Lawrence Vale is Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning at MIT, where he served as Head of the Department of Urban Studies and Planning from 2002-2009. He holds degrees from Amherst, MIT, and the University of Oxford. Vale is the author of many books examining urban design and housing, including Architecture, Power, and National Identity (Spiro Kostof Book Award), From the Puritans to the Projects (Best Book in Urban Affairs, Urban Affairs Association), and Reclaiming Public Housing (Paul Davidoff Book Award, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning).
MECHTILD WIDRICH
Mechtild Widrich is postdoctoral fellow and lecturer at the Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich (ETH). Her research focuses on ephemeral practices in relation to the built environment. Forthcoming is an essay on the role of the public in performance art (TDR, 2013), an article on Riegl and the memory boom of the 1990s (JSAH, 2013), as well as her book *Performative Monuments* (University of Manchester Press); Widrich recently published in *Grey Room, Art Journal* and *PAJ*. She is the co-founder of the Art and Architectural History Assembly, an international network of researchers working at the intersection of art and architecture.

THE YES MEN
Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, The Yes Men (revolting@theyesmen.org), are a culture jamming activist duo and network of supporters created by Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, known for their outrageous satirical interventions at business events, on the internet, on television, and in the streets. Through tactical transmedia actions combining subterfuge, performance art, and comedy, The Yes Men raise awareness of crucial causes and mobilize the public to action. Their satirical interventions form the basis of two award-winning documentary features, *The Yes Men* and *The Yes Men Fix the World*, festival favorites at Sundance, Amsterdam, Toronto, Berlin, SXSW and others. The Yes Men have authored of numerous books and articles on creative activism and lecture internationally on art and social change.
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REVOLUTION!
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thresholds 42: Human prompts us to consider the past and present changing notion of ‘the human’ with regards to its physical, virtual, and psychological habitat.

In the last decade innovations within cognitive imaging, computer interfaces, communication technologies, surrogate natures, sensory mediators, and global tracking have reshaped our understanding of the Self. This shift can be seen, on one hand, as a revolution of sensibilities while, on the other hand, still pushing towards an enlightenment-based, rationalist perspective of the human as a neurobiological mechanism. No matter which way this ‘human’ is being reshaped, does it not also reshape ‘the humanities’ as well as our understanding of ‘humanity’? Have we indeed formed new gateways of artistic and architectural possibility or have we forced ourselves into a deterministic and mechanistic view of both occupants and design? Humans are different than machines, after all, but how has the human/machine duality been rethought in our current age? How does art, architecture and film envision, critique, or challenge this ‘new human’?

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thresholds@mit.edu

For correspondence and inquiries:
Tyler Stevermer, Editor
thresholds, MIT Architecture
77 Massachusetts Ave, Room 7-337
Cambridge, MA 02139
thresholds@mit.edu

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