

Volume 6, Number 1/2, 2023

ARCHITECTURE PHILOSOPHY

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VOL. 6

NO. 1/2

2023

Architecture Philosophy is the journal of the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture (ISPA). The society was founded in 2009 by Carolyn Fahey, and the journal was first published in 2014 by Tom Spector, Carolyn Fahey, and Stefan Koller.

Architecture Philosophy proudly acknowledges the financial support from the Oklahoma State University School of Architecture and the College of Engineering Architecture and Technology that makes free distribution of print copies possible. The journal also acknowledges the support from the Oklahoma State University Library for making the submission management software, the journal's online presence, and its indexing in academic search engines a reality.

Architecture Philosophy (ISSN 2372-0883) is published semiannually. Two parts form a volume. The subscription is free for digital copies, and print copies are available to society members. Visit isparchitecture.com for digital access to the journal's content

Graphic design: Carolyn Fahey
Lay-out: Hans Teerds

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CONTACT

WEB isparchitecture.com

EMAIL isparchitecture@gmail.com

tom.spector@okstate.edu

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AMSTERDAM (2018)

PUBLIC SPACE. THE REAL AND THE IDEAL. EDITORIAL

ANDRÉ PATRÃO, HANS TEERDS,
CHRISTOPH BAUMBERGER, AND TOM SPECTOR

While the importance of public space seems mostly undisputed, much disagreement continues to emerge concerning its purposes, its boundaries, its characteristics, its use, and most importantly the extent of the threats it faces.

Different visions of public space have taken form in the works of such diverse architectural and urban practitioners, historians and critics, as Camillo Sitte, Kenneth Frampton, Rem Koolhaas, Michael Sorkin, Margaret Crawford, and Jan Gehl, but also of urban sociologists like Setha Low and Lyn Lofland, activists such as Jane Jacobs and Mike Davis, as well as such influential philosophers and political theorists as Henri Lefebvre, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Chantal Mouffe. Many of them have read public space from a humanistic, pluralistic, democratic perspective, offering various descriptions of what it might mean in the broader context of a democratic society's organization. And while their ideals of social interaction and political debate do not necessarily constrain the definition of a public space to a physical location, historically these values frequently find tangible expression in the Greek agora, the coffee shop, the city square, the town hall, the parliament, and especially the street. The built environment therefore offers more than just functional areas or aesthetic experiences. It is a force that shapes a world-in-common, grounded on encounter and appearance, discussion and mediation, with all the tension and conflict that implies.

Today, this ideal of public space must address new challenges and renewed versions of the old, from recent developments in cities and societies

such as smart-cities, Big Data, and gentrification, to such well-established problems as segregation, commodification, and surveillance. The recent history of public spaces finds them increasingly privatized, controlled, monitored, and scripted. They are designed to accommodate leisure and tourism, shopping and sporting, transportation and traveling, often with little regard for the social and political ideal of encounter and exchange, thereby neglecting to make room for the struggles and disputes inherent to it. But, it has turned out, that even in highly controlled spaces social and political life can occur, as shown for example in the 2022 protests in Iran, where despite the risk of arrest and even death, people take to the streets to protest against the restrictions to women's participation in public life. This state of affairs presses the questions: How important is architecture and urban design for public life after all? Does design still draw concrete outlines for public life and its socio-political dimensions, or can these be catered for elsewhere? And how does philosophy help elucidate and tackle these problems?

These and many other topics concerning public space were discussed at the 5th Biennial Conference of the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture, organized by ETH Zürich and the EPFL. After a one-year postponement due to the outbreak of a pandemic and the public health restrictions that ensued – and added another topic of concern to the agenda – the conference met in 2021 at Monte Verità, a former utopian-like hub of alternative cooperative life in the Swiss canton of Ticino, standing in the beautiful landscape between the Alps and Lago Maggiore. What followed were four days of lively, varied, intense exchanges between more than eighty speakers, including philosophers, architectural theorists, architects, urban planners, urban designers, landscape architects, and scholars of many other fields. Ten contributions, including all four keynote lectures, have been published in this special double issue of *Architecture Philosophy*.

To prepare the ground for such a sprawling topic, the first article briefly surveys pivotal moments in the history of public space and the ways it has been read, touching upon several of its key themes and recurring philosophical figures. Sven-Olov Wallenstein's 'Public Space: Conflicts and Antinomies' moves from the fabricated idea of an ideal Greek polis to Kant's constitution of one in the spirit of the Enlightenment, a foundational moment for the modern notion of a public political space. The accounts that followed, until this day, have often stressed the rise and looming fall of public space, perceived as perpetually and increasingly under threat. However, public space has also been described as inherently conflictual, not anomalously (divergences to be reconciled) but constitutively (the

clashes of those divergences are what characterizes public space). These versions do not converge, nor does one exclude the other. As Wallenstein states, they “[...] can neither be fused into a common story, nor can we simply choose between them; perhaps they can be said to constitute something like the antinomy of public space.”¹

A leading proponent of the conflictual view is Chantal Mouffe, who made her case in the lecture published here under the title ‘On the Political: Public Space and the Possibility of a Critical Architecture.’ Liberal philosophical discourses, Mouffe claims, react to the antagonist dimension of the political as a problem to be resolved, either through a rational compromise between different interests or a consensus grounded on free discussion. However, “[...] despite what many liberals want us to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not to overcome this ‘we/them’ opposition, but how to construct this opposition, compatible with the recognition of pluralism.”² Mouffe proposes agonism as an alternative, one which embraces the existence of conflicting interests not by regarding the other as an enemy, as in an antagonistic relation, but as a legitimate adversary. Public spaces, therefore, function at their best not as places of accord but of dispute. The construction or challenge to hegemonic political identities also unfolds outside of political institutions, importantly through artistic practices – in which Mouffe includes architecture.

How do these philosophical ideas play out in the built environment? In ‘The Space of Appearance within the Megalopolis: Architectural Culture-Politics of São Paulo 1957-2017’, Kenneth Frampton calls attention to the contemporary challenges that arise for public spaces – in their political and constructive senses – with the recent transformation of the polis into the megalopolis. In São Paulo, the most populated city in Brasil and one of the biggest in the world, he discovers numerous works that open a space of appearance in the Arendtian

“ THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OFFERS MORE THAN JUST FUNCTIONAL AREAS OR AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES. IT IS A FORCE THAT SHAPES A WORLD-IN-COMMON.”

sense, such as the *SESC Pompeia* by Lina Bo Bardi and Marcelo Ferraz, the *Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo* by João Vilanova Artigas, and the *SESC 2017* by Paulo Mendes da Rocha. In these examples, Frampton says, one can admire a distinctive Paulista-school “[...] accommodation of socio-cultural and politically progressive programs within the fabric of tectonically articulated, monumental form.”³

Many different agents participate in the design and use of public urban spaces besides – though by no means excluding – architects and urbanists. Hans Teerds’ interview with Margaret Crawford, ‘A Site of Struggle,’ explores more contemporary case-studies in the United States, particularly in California. The shopping mall, once the target of Crawford’s ineludible critiques on the privatization of public space, reappears in a more favorable light. As she points out, “[...] many people now go to malls more for public interaction rather than to actually buy something. Physical shopping can be understood as a positive force shaping public space, as compared to online shopping from home.”⁴ Crawford also commented on recent examples where the use of public spaces turned contentious – antagonistic, even – involving, for example, migrant workers waiting for a ride in front of private stores, street-vendors in Los Angeles, barbecuers at a public park in Oakland, and the Black Lives Matter movement, which Crawford labels as “[...] the most important public space development in the last 10 years.”⁵ Each of these particular instances illustrates and reasserts the recurring idea throughout all the keynote speakers of public space as a place of struggle.

An influential claim from within this struggle issued decades ago by Henri Lefebvre – another well-known author in the discussion of public space – was a focal point of Saul Fisher’s ‘Architectural Responsibilities and the Right to a City.’ He revisits Lefebvre’s notion of “the right to the city” so as to render it “feasible, generic, and so broadly amenable to many of its adherents,” while illustrating the effects of its denial through several hypothetical scenarios of contemporary life.⁶ Fisher’s crucial question goes even further though: if we are to accept such a right, then what responsibilities does it entail for architects?

The question may also be asked of the right to refuge from public space. Erika Brandl speaks of adequate housing as a basic need in ‘Property, Necessity, and Housing: Reconsidering the Situated Right to a Place to Be.’ She stresses that the question “‘Why must something be done inside and not outside the house?’ is another way of asking ‘Why are dwellings so necessary to us?’”⁷ Through the works of Jeremy Waldron, Richard Epstein, and Alejandra Mancilla, Brandl demonstrates how political philosophy not only sheds light on architectural problems of domesticity, but also on what architectural practice can do to address them.

Beyond the framework of a dichotomy between the private and the public lays the Chinese notion of *jianghu*, as explained by Esther Lorenz in ‘Anonymity in *Jianghu*: Hong Kong’s Urban Space in Times of Crisis.’ *Jianghu* has come to define a realm deliberately apart from societal and political order. Lorenz uses this word, which literally translates into “rivers and lakes,” to better understand a description of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, a movement inspired by the Bruce Lee quote “be like water.” Through uncontrollable anonymous digital means, protesters coalesced like flash-floods to turn unexpected places like roads and roofs into ephemeral political public spaces. According to Lorenz, “[w]hat we witnessed in 2019 in Hong Kong was the emergence of a contemporary form of *jianghu*, as a hybridization of digital space, material space, and spatial practices.”⁸

Conversely, even the most stereotypical typology of public space does not guarantee a site for social and political aggregation. Stella Evangelidou analyzes the design strategy behind an intervention on southern Nicosia’s main square, in ‘Parametric Design in the Historic Urban Domain: The Case of Eleftheria Square by Zaha Hadid Architects.’ Parametricism, she argues, operated not simply as a design tool but as an architectural ideology; polemical from the project’s conception and selection to its use after construction. As Evangelidou sees it, “[t]he hyper-aestheticized and non-functional forms have displaced political actions from the site. Eleftheria Square has lost its quality as a *topos politikos*.”⁹

The powerful potential of architecture, whether positive or negative, intended or not, upon the social and political dimensions of public space is at the center of Margit van Schaik’s study of its most symbolic sites. ‘What Architecture Does – An Embodied Approach towards the Impact of the Built Environment’ considers how the architectural properties of the Dutch Parliament Building affect the manner in which politics is conducted in the

“THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC SPACE DEVELOPMENT IN THE LAST 10 YEARS.”

country, but keeps some distance from deterministic claims. As she says, “[...] a window does not determine you look through it, but it does influence what you will see if you do.”¹⁰ Van Schaik grounds her outlook on input from philosophy of mind, psychology and neuroscience, brought together in the theories of embodiment advanced by Francisco Varela and Evan Thomson.

A different approach to one’s embodied experience of place adopts Bernard Rudolsky’s sandals as a medium. ‘On Foot: Embodied Atmospheres,’ by Andreea Mihalache, suggests that “[m]ore than footwear, the sandals are a design manifesto expressing the connection between feet and floors, always in touch through the intimacy of the sole [...]”¹¹ Against the long-standing dominant formal and sight-centered attitudes in both philosophy and architecture, Mihalache urges for the embrace of subjective experience of atmospheres as a design criteria, which has precedent in the two disciplines’ history nonetheless. Roaming around houses, strolling down streets, the tactile experience of walking partakes in the finding of one’s ground – literally and figuratively.

All ten contributions offer deeply informative, intellectually stimulating, thought-provoking insights. They tackle plenty of topics, engaged from diverse research frameworks, and look at distinct case-studies from multiple times and places, to reach a variety of significant claims which may overlap or conflict, but all contribute to an understanding of the real and ideal characteristics of public space. These results emerge from a historically productive dialogue between two disciplines while thinking together. That long and fruitful tradition continues in this special issue of *Architecture Philosophy*.

ENDNOTES

1. Sven-Olov Wallenstein, ‘Public Space. Conflicts and Antinomies’, in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 13.
2. Chantal Mouffe, ‘On the Political, Public Space and the Possibility of a Critical Architecture’, in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 29.
3. Kenneth Frampton, ‘The Space of Appearance within the Megalopolis. Architectural Culture-Politics of São Paulo 1957-2017’, in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 45.
4. Hans Teerds, ‘A Site of Struggle. An Interview with Margaret Crawford’, in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 51-52.
5. Ibid., 58.
6. Saul Fisher, ‘Architectural Responsibilities and the Right to a City’, in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 63.

7. Erika Brandl, 'Property, Necessity and Housing. Reconsidering the Situated Right to a Place to Be', in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 85.
8. Esther Lorenz, 'Anonymity in *Jianghu*. Hong Kong's Urban Space in Times of Crisis'. in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 113.
9. Stella Evangelidou, 'Parametric Design in the Historic Urban Domain. The Case of Eleftheria Square by Zaha Hadid Architects', in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 135.
10. Margit van Schaik, 'What Architecture Does. An Embodied Approach Towards the Impact of the Built Environment', in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 149.
11. Andreea Mihalache, 'On Foot. Embodied Atmospheres', in: *Architecture Philosophy*, Vol 6, no.1/2 (2023), 165.



PUBLIC SPACE, CONFLICTS AND ANTINOMIES

SVEN-OLOV WALLENSTEIN

The idea of public space is crucial for our political imagination, precisely because it is perceived as being not only threatened, but even as on the way toward extinction. Throughout its history, the concept seems to imply both a promise of a more transparent social world, and a threat to which we are exposed: it is a space of free exchange, but also one to which we are subjected, and where conflict seems unending.

In this sense, two competing versions could be given: the first one would tell a story of the rise and fall of public space, and it is probably the most common one; the second, which is less frequent, presents public space as always and structurally constituted by a conflict that will make it into a space of struggle, where the dreams of undistorted communication not only cover over the reality of power, but in fact are instrumental for its deployment. These two can neither be fused into a common story, nor can we simply choose between them; perhaps they can be said to constitute something like the antinomy of public space.

KANT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The classical origin of most stories of public space is the agora in the Greek polis, which has taken on a symbolic value for all subsequent theorizing, notwithstanding the fact that it must be seen as a retroactive fantasy, similarly to many other such Greek “origins” that have been assumed since the late eighteenth century onwards. That the selection of citizens that were allowed to take part in Greek democracy was indeed small has been brushed aside, which has made it possible to transform it

into a model for various promises of a restored *Gemeinschaft* in modernity, a community that would rest on a direct “representation,” as if the exclusionary mechanisms at once had been repressed and sublimated into a kind of ideal space. This trope appears in Winckelmann, Rousseau, the early Romantics, the young Hegel (who would later discard it), and many other thinkers on the eighteenth century that were trying to articulate a new foundation for political theory after the downfall of the absolutist-theological model. (In fact, even though this is rarely made into an explicit theme, the various versions of contract theory seem to require something like a common space, a medium of assembly, in which the first act of signing occurs, since it takes place at one singular point in time, not as a series of individual events separated in space and time.)

The second step in this story is the construction of an ideal public space, which as we noted often looks back to its alleged Greek origin, and yet constitutes something basically new. This is the idea of a world of rational reflection, communication, and judgment that would rely on readers dispersed in space and time, only related through the sense that they share a common rational project. We find this outlined in Kant,¹ in his conception of the Enlightenment and its *Öffentlichkeit* as a spatial and temporal ideal form where all dogmas, theoretical as well as moral and political, can be subjected to debate. To participate in this debate, Kant proposes, one must however act as a “public” person and not as a bearer of official authority, as in the case of the judge, the magistrate, the priest, etc., which in Kant’s vocabulary are “private” uses of reason (for us today, this terminology would be inverted). The divide between these two roles comes across in a statement that has spawned many vitriolic remarks, and it seems to make Kant into a late-come proponent of the traditional doctrine of Reason of State, or even a kind of Prussian state philosopher: “Reason as much as you wish but obey!” What Kant in fact means, however, is something different that still today remains a basic tenet of legal theory. Whoever acts as a figure of public authority must uphold what Kant in other contexts calls the “mechanism of society,” since processes based on authority must be transparent and predictable once the initial variables are clearly staked out. We may indeed reason as much as we want, and question the soundness of laws. but this reasoning belongs to a space of individual, intellectual license, which as such is not the basis of procedures of authority. When passing a judgment, the court must follow the law, even though each of its members may very well perceive the law as unjust.

While the private use of reason is based on authority and obedience, Kant stresses the processual character of the public debate, which means that it should remain open-ended. We are living in an age of *enlightenment*,

he writes, not an *enlightened* age, since the latter would assume that reason had been perfected. If the process were to be stopped, i.e., if we would attain a perfect “match” between thinking and world, such a state could in a sense not be separated from a metaphysical dogmatism where truth could be decreed, and reasoning comes to an end. Enlightenment is reflexive, in the sense that it must always be prepared to question its own results.

As Kant notes, this is due to a “maturing capacity for judgment” characteristic of that period which allows for the step out of our “self-incurred tutelage” (*Unmündigkeit*), as he writes in the Enlightenment essay which also makes it all the more essential for everyone of us to attempt to “think in the place of everyone else,” as he later will say in the *Critique of Judgment* (§ 40).² What Kant in fact discovers, as he moves from the first to the third *Critique* and the various essays on politics, is that judgment is not simply “determining,” as in theoretical cognition, but also “reflexive,” engaging a dimension of intersubjectivity that requires us to change perspective, and to project a possible future where we all would be spontaneously reconciled, while still acknowledging that no empirical state of affairs could ever be said to be precisely such a fulfilled state.

In the third *Critique*, the discussion of judgment is carried out in terms of taste, beauty, and the sublime, and the link to the political writings does not at first hand seem obvious, although a closer reading of the texts reveals many subterranean links. They are however always tentative, as if experiments in thought that transfer propositional forms by way of analogy, metaphor, metonymy, and a host of other figures. Rather than an aestheticizing of politics, or a politicizing of aesthetics, the twofold temptation that haunts post-Kantian modernity, it is an exercise in what Kant in the third *Critique* calls an “enlarged mode of thought” (*erweiterte Denkungsart*), a reflection that does not aim for

grounding in theory of practice, but moves freely between them, drawing on all types of sources and texts, unfolding in the interstices of imagination and judgment.

For instance, when Kant refers to the French revolution, he introduces the idea of a “sign of history” that would account for the way in which empirical events impact not only the affective part of the spectator, but also introduces ideas of reason, and even constitutes a kind of historical teleology, although surrounded by several caveats. The sign introduces a certain temporal dimension, and, as we will see, it at least communicates indirectly with the idea of a public space that would be materialized and embodied in a kind of monumentality. The relevant passages can be found in the second part of Kant’s *The Conflict of Faculties*,³ where the question is whether progress in history can be ascertained or not. No direct empirical facts will suffice, Kant claims, instead we should attempt to find “signs” that indicate—indirectly, precisely as *signs*—the existence of a transformed moral disposition. The French revolution, he suggests, is such a case, not because it has brought about shifts and changes in government (these may be reversed, and even lead to a factually worse state than before), but because it affects the spectators in a particular fashion. It is not the violence, the sound and fury of the *res gestae* that signify moral improvement; in fact, at the end of the day, the effects of the revolution may be such that it actually increases the amount of suffering in the world. The crucial aspect is what Kant calls *enthusiasm*,⁴ a particular passion among those who experience it from a certain distance, in this case from across the Rhine: it is the Germans who are filled with enthusiasm, and a whole generation of idealist philosophers and poets in the wake of Kant will corroborate his analysis. The Germans, Kant argues, are precisely by virtue of their distance from the stage of history exempt from the violence of pathological passions, since they have nothing to gain by entertaining them; on the contrary, their passions will be redirected from immediate aims towards moral principles, and in this they indicate a particular receptivity for ideas that is lost in the immediate imbroglio of the French milieu.

First, we must note the theatrical dimension. The drama is organized by the divide between stage and audience, perhaps to some extent drawing on an implicit reading of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where enthusiasm replaces *katharsis* as the desired outcome. But the revolution is as such obviously not a fiction, rather a real event whose moral effect can only be discerned if it passes through a certain distancing and aesthetic derelization. The impact of the political is registered in a quasi-aesthetic space, and even though the real (events and actions) cannot be reduced to an aesthetic phenomenon, the relation to moral principles can only be created by way

of a certain circulation within an aesthetic realm. The entangled nature of these relations no doubt signals a hesitance on Kant's part, but, arguably, just as much the contradictory and entangled nature of the real itself.

To this we must add the temporal nature of the historical sign: it is a *signum rememorativum, demonstrativum et prognosticon*, i.e. a sign of *memory* that tells us that there has always been a certain amount of progress, a sign that demonstrates that there is a case in the present, and a sign that offers the *prognosis* that there will be progress in the future, that hope is not lost regardless of the vicissitudes of the revolution at present. In this sense, it institutes a historical possibility: even though empirical events may lead us astray and even turn out disastrously, this possibility cannot sink into complete oblivion. The same holds for the Enlightenment, which for Kant, as we saw, is not simply an empirical phase in history, but a reflexive move within reason itself, in which it calls upon itself to know itself, from within, without any support from transcendent authorities.

The sign can in this sense be understood within a logic of the monument: it preserves a moment in time, embodies an idea, and projects it into the future. Orienting the affective response of the beholder towards the domain of moral principles and supersensible ideas, it points to a possibility to be realized in the future. But it also points to the transcendence of such a future in relation to all empirical presents; the aesthetic affect must remain in an imaginary realm, if it is to retain its force in the realm of political, whereas any collapse of the two into each other would be precisely a "transcendental illusion" in the sense Kant had already outlined in the first Critique.

The sign of history is only one of the many intermediary figures that Kant proposes to create a bridge between the sensible and the supersensible, nature and freedom, and it is no easy task to sort them in a clear order, or to see if they are connected,

“IF THE “CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL REASON” REMAINED IN A STATE OF FRAGMENTATION AND SUSPENSION, IT WAS BECAUSE THE POLITICAL FOR KANT COULDN'T BE SUBSUMED UNDER A PRIORI PRINCIPLES.”

THE RISE AND FALL OF PUBLIC SPACE

hierarchically or otherwise. As Lyotard points out (and in this he often comes close to Arendt),⁵ if the “critique of political reason” remained in a state of fragmentation and suspension, it was because the political for Kant couldn’t be subsumed under a priori principles, but always mobilized concepts drawn from cognition, ethics, and aesthetics, even religion, in a way that blurs the line between proper and improper uses.

In the tradition from Kant, this lack of a priori principles has often been taken as a positive characteristic: it is the absence of univocal rules that constitutes the idea of society as a kind of ongoing mediation and reflection, an open-ended process of legitimization and production of consensus that neither acknowledges the decrees issued by a sovereign power, nor those of any alleged science of politics. Thus, many have claimed that the creation of a modern political space would have Kantian Criticism and the French Revolution as two founding moments. As Claude Lefort puts it, the end of the eighteenth century would have been the moment of the “democratic invention” or the “invention of democracy,”⁶ which as such was marked by a constitutive ambivalence: the subject that speaks (the “people”) is at the same time to be brought forth in this very same address, via a kind of political performativity. But rather than simply a contradiction that in advance would undermine this new political logic, the performative is what dismantles the theological and/or ontological foundation of politics, to the effect that we can say that there *is* politics, in the modern sense of the term, precisely to the extent that the very idea of a foundation has eroded. There is an absence at the heart of society, a void that many are indeed eager and even desperate to fill, which is why a certain totalitarian temptation always follows modern democracy like a shadow (for instance, as we noted earlier, by letting the aesthetic fill out this gap, not just as a “bridge,” as Kant writes, but as a common positive ground).

A somewhat different narrative is provided by Jürgen Habermas, from his early analysis of the public sphere to the later theories of communicative action.⁷ For him, the idea of a constitutive void or indeterminacy is not enough to safeguard a modern idea of the political; instead, he suggests that the theory of communication must be given a “transcendental” status if the respective roles of discourse are to be safeguarded. Despite these differences, Lefort’s and Habermas’s theories both delineate powerful and highly influential narratives of the emergence of political freedom as connected to the space of public life, and for both the Kantian moment occupies a central place.

It is however also crucial that in both accounts (more emphatically in Habermas), the public sphere is perceived as under threat. When Habermas in his classic 1962 study on the transformations of the public sphere begins by locating the promise of a public sphere, he points to the time of Kant and the emergence of what could be called modern media as a site of free reflection (they create a “world of readers,” *eine Leserwelt*, as Kant says). But at the same time, this account seems already from the outset destined to end with the corruption of this very same system, at a point where it is absorbed by commercial interests and becomes part of a culture of the spectacle. One can ask to what extent the public sphere that Habermas’s whole discourse mourns for ever existed; if it was there as a promise at the end of the Enlightenment, as an idea (but nothing more) in Kant, then as soon as its real and material infrastructure was set in place, it began to deteriorate.

It seems clear that the idea of a single public space governed by the rules of rational communication was never, or will ever be, instantiated empirically, and in this sense it can only be taken as a “regulative” idea in the Kantian sense: it is there in order to make sense of, or more precisely to judge and evaluate, a given empirical manifold, but it is never instantiated as such, which is probably why Habermas in his later writings comes to understand the ideal communicative situation as a transcendental requirement (or in terms of a “transcendental pragmatics,” as proposed by Karl-Otto Apel).⁸ The problem with this however is whether such a regulative idea is at all capable of accounting for a factual development: it achieves its authority by adopting a normative transcendence with respect to the vicissitudes of history, while it remains unclear to what extent any of these factual developments were ever directed by this ideal. Similarly, one could ask if the ideal of a transparent communication could ever account for what goes

“IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE IDEA OF A SINGLE PUBLIC SPACE GOVERNED BY THE RULES OF RATIONAL COMMUNICATION WAS NEVER, OR WILL EVER BE, INSTANTIATED EMPIRICALLY.”

on in communication; simply reiterating the traditional divide between *is* and *ought* may seem like evading the question, or at least to remain deaf to what goes on in language. The later claims by Habermas that the problems could be settled through a “procedural rationality” (a minimum set of rules that safeguard rationality without making any substantial claims about the content of debates) seems to go in the same direction, and appears to assume that the basic questions have already been solved, or at least could be bracketed because of their technical, specialized nature.⁹

Drawing on Habermasian ideas, but in a way that stays closer to concrete problems of public space, the urban theorist Michael Sorkin has suggested an analogous account of the privatization of public space, which ends on an even more apocalyptic note and predicts the “end of public space”.¹⁰ Many other similar cases could be cited; a conclusion would be that it seems almost unavoidable to inscribe the idea of a public “site” (whose spatial characteristics may vary) for rational political discourse in a story that tells of rise and decline. If such a site once existed—be it the Greek *agora*, the Renaissance city, the ideal space of the Enlightenment—it is now a memory, an object of nostalgia. At the same time, this narrative cannot simply ascribe the demise of its object to some external cause: the rise of an affluent class that only looks to its own interests, the commercial press, the proliferation of information, technological changes; all of these are both what made this site, space, or sphere possible, and that which lies behind its inevitable deterioration in the present.

GENEALOGIES OF PUBLIC SPACE

Other narratives than those of rise and fall are obviously possible, not just in the sense that they would cite other empirical cases, but also, and more profoundly, in that they would question its underlying assumptions. In some cases, they could amount to what looks like an inversion of the first story. So in the case of Richard Sennett, whose *The Fall of Public Man* attempts to show how the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on personal authenticity and psychological truthfulness, displaced an Enlightenment culture of conversation and of the salon.¹¹ In the eighteenth century “public man” was at liberty to stage a self, in a kind of enactment of the self in terms of rhetoric rather than psychology, whereas the nineteenth century would instead demand that one should appear as one truly is and condemn the split between inside and outside as a sign of moral inaptitude.¹²

Other stories take us beyond the figure of reversal, and instead opt for a different and more conflict-ridden understanding of the historical process, tending to something that, following Nietzsche and Foucault, could be

called a “genealogical” model.¹³ In these stories, it makes no sense to ask if public space in the “true” sense existed at one point or another, if it was once a promise that was later betrayed for some reason, or if there has been a fall from one state to another. Public space has always been both an object of dispute, and a disputed space of the dispute itself, to the effect that it has no true or ideal sense beyond all the ways in which it has been appropriated, rejected, contested, and redefined. If such a space has a constant feature—this time not in the sense of a regulative idea but rather that of a pervasive empirical fact—it is that it has always been based on various exclusions and hidden or explicit privileges, as any analysis of the actual composition of the alleged origins in the Greek political assemblies and the *agora* will unambiguously show.

As Rosalyn Deutsche suggests, the kind of analysis that we have previously discussed, which mourns the downfall of an ideal public domain, might even, somewhat provocatively, be called “agoraphobia.”¹⁴ What it profoundly fears, she argues, is to acknowledge that all public discourse is marked by asymmetries and power relations, not just incidentally and contingently, but structurally and constitutively. Non-violent discourse might in this sense fulfill a very traditional definition of ideology: an imaginary solution to real contradictions, transposed to the realm of regulative ideas that always *ought* to be realized, but in fact never *are* (similarly to way in which the idea that all humans are equal in principle can serve to obscure that fact that they are never equal in reality). Such an ideal will always appear as distant in time or space, always lost or to come, and this temporal projection is what holds fear at bay by rationalizing it.

In a similar vein, Chantal Mouffe claims that “the political,” which for her must be distinguished from “politics” in the empirical sense of processes of policy-making and decision-making, has to do with the way in which a society is symbolically instituted

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in terms of a fundamental *antagonism*.¹⁵ This she distinguishes from liberal conceptions, which are based on an “aggregative” model that understands the political in terms of the economy and the market, and from a deliberative model that understands the political as the application of morality. For Mouffe, the political has to do with *passions*, and to take a political stance will always involve a separation between an “us” and a “them,” which creates an asymmetry in the space in which the two parties are to meet. The problem for Mouffe becomes to what extent this antagonism can be transformed into an “agonism” that would allow passionate encounters while still mitigating or sublimating the violence of antagonism. How can we acknowledge the legitimacy of the opponent, without reference to a set of rules or a rational consensus to be achieved as the outcome? Does the shift to agonism not presuppose some standard according to which it can be construed as successful—or, inversely, as has been argued by Slavoj Žižek, must the idea, or ideal, of agonism, not have recourse to a more basic liberal-capitalist order that itself cannot be challenged?

Just as for Deutsche, this has important consequences for the notion of public space. Mouffe places her theory in clear opposition to the one proposed by Habermas, but also, although less clearly, to Hannah Arendt, whose conception of an “enlarged thought” and a political intersubjectivity draws on Kant’s aesthetics.¹⁶ For Mouffe, public space cannot be seen as one entity that could subsequently be occupied or compromised by external forces, rather it is a constitutive plurality in a sense that goes beyond the peaceful “space of appearance” as delineated by Arendt: it is a multiply contested and non-symmetric space, a battleground traversed by struggles for hegemony. If public space is the space where politics is realized, this can only occur through acts of confrontation and unmasking. What Mouffe proposes is that the public domain must be seen as an ongoing experimental construction, rather than as a regulative idea against which all empirical domains should be measured and against which they all will appear as deficient.

THE ANTINOMY OF PUBLIC SPACE

How should we judge the conflict between those two stories? To some extent it is reminiscent of what Paul Ricoeur once called a “conflict of interpretations,”¹⁷ i.e. between a restorative hermeneutics that wants to return to an original sense buried under sediments of history, and a “hermeneutics of suspicion” in the wake of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, for which the given—consciousness, texts, or, as in this case, this strange entity called public space—always harbors inner contradictions that must be unearthed, and that eventually will destroy the unity of the object in question.

But perhaps the choice of the word “hermeneutics” as an overarching term is misleading, since it glosses over the highly different conceptions of thought itself that we find in these two conceptions. At stake are not just methodologies of interpretation, but a kind of antinomy that lies deep in the heart of thought itself. But what, then, is this antinomy?

The term seems as such to already settle the conflict, since it belongs to the Kantian vocabulary. For Kant, an antinomy results from two conflicting interests, and his chief example is the notion of freedom: for the understanding, as the faculty that legislates over the science of nature, the interest lies in maximizing the scope of causality, and freedom is an impossible concept, since it would disrupt the causal chain. For the faculty of reason (as opposed to the faculty of understanding, and directed towards ideas), the interest is to safeguard a sphere of the supersensible that preserves the autonomy of rational agents. In natural science, causal chains must be seamless, and that free actions do not exist is not an empirical discovery, but an a priori requirement. For ethics, freedom is inversely what is required for the moral law to be at all applicable, and its status cannot be revoked by any reference to physics. What holds together these two claims is the architectonic of reason, which allows the sensible (nature) and the supersensible to co-exist.¹⁸

Now, in the case of public space, just as in Kant’s analysis of freedom, both parties can argue their respective cases forcefully: the idealist account lays claim to an ethical necessity (no empirical facts can settle the question of what public space should be), whereas the genealogical seems to refer to a kind of sensible manifold (ethical ideals are not what matters, but rather significance lies in what people in fact do). What is striking, and rather different than in Kantian philosophy, is that the first version, which stresses universals and communicative action, tends to be pessimistic about the present and even more so about the future, whereas the

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second version, which stresses contingency and forces, tends to see the future as open and undecided. What seems to be at stake here is thus not the difference between theoretical and practical reason, or between nature and freedom, as Kant would have it, but rather between two versions of freedom, which is why we cannot solve the issue by an appeal to some putative architecture of reason. The antinomy of public space in this sense testifies to division between two ideas or even ideals of philosophy, rather than to a split inside a particular philosophy.

ENDNOTES

1. The classic text is Immanuel Kant's 1784 essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).
2. Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?' Mary C. Smith, tr. <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>.
3. Translated in *Political Writings* (as in note 1).
4. I draw here on the commentary by Jean-François Lyotard, *L'enthousiasme: La critique kantienne de l'histoire* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).
5. Which is not to say that their readings coincide: in many respects they differ sharply, in a way not unrelated to the antinomy between the two stories of public space that will be sketched in the following section.
6. See Claude Lefort *L'invention démocratique: Les limites de la domination totalitaire* (Paris: Fayard, 1981).
7. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Luchterhand: Neuwied, 1962), and Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).
8. See for instance Karl-Otto Apel, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental Pragmatic Perspective*, trans. Georgia Warnke (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1984).
9. In another terminology, the idea of a procedural rationality endowed with an intentionally "thin" definition seems to deny the possibility of "deep conflicts", i.e., conflicts where the very nature of rules is at stake. Interestingly, such conflicts are abundant at the level that many (though not all) philosophers would see as the basic one, the foundations of mathematics and logic.
10. See for instance the contributions in Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992). For a critical discussion of Sorkin's account, as well as of similar proposals by Mike Davis, see

Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Men in Space,' in Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). This is obviously not to deny the empirical pertinence of the analyses of late capitalist space and of the commodification of the urban landscape proposed by Sorkin and Davis; it does however mean to question their underlying narrative structure, which tends to project a past and more ideal situation or possibility that at one point were betrayed.

11. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Random House, 1977).
12. While doubtless effective as an antidote to the traditional story, the image of a fall occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century, should not lead us into believing that free public sphere once existed, and then vanished, but we should rather see one contradictory and tension-laden structure displacing another, as Sennett shows. That the ideal of public man was highly disputed can be seen in the writings of Rousseau and Diderot. If Diderot in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien* shows how the actor's distance from himself is a precondition for theater, then Rousseau can be said to invert this theory by making theater itself into a paradigm for false social relations, as in his *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*.
13. For Foucault's account of Nietzsche, see 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in: Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Simon Sherry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). Foucault says little about public space, but it would no doubt be fruitful to enter this complex via his analysis of Greek democracy and his discussion of parrhesia, "fearless speech," which always introduces a difference that breaks with the merely formal symmetry of equals. See the

two last courses at the Collège de France, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres: Cours au Collège de France (1982-1983)*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil ; 2008), and *Le courage de la vérité: Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II: Cours au Collège de France (1983-1984)*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil: 2009).

14. See Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Agoraphobia,' in: Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).
15. For Mouffe's views, see Chantal Mouffe, *On the political* (London: Routledge, 2005), and Chantal Mouffe, 'Agonistic Public Spaces, Democratic Politics, and the Dynamics of Passion,' in: Joseph Backstein, Daniel Birnbaum, and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (eds.), *Thinking Worlds: The Moscow Conference on Philosophy, Politics, and Art* (New York and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008). For the relation to Carl Schmitt and the conception of the political as oriented along the axis friend-foe, see her anthology Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999).
16. See Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1992).
17. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, new ed. 2007).
18. I disregard some of the more objectionable moves that permit Kant to close the gap between theoretical and practical reason, above all the reference to the thing itself, of which he says that it is at least not contradictory to assume would be the locus of a free, supersensible causality. Kant is perhaps too eager to close the gap, because of the demand for an architectonic unity of reason, even though his "dissolution" (*Auflösung*) of the antinomy is dependent on it, as I think is evinced by respective developments of the theme in Arendt and Lyotard.

ON THE POLITICAL, PUBLIC SPACE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE

CHANTAL MOUFFE

In ordinary language, it is not very common to speak about ‘the political.’¹ However, to distinguish between the political and politics opens up an important alley for reflection. I am not the first nor the only one to make this distinction. A variety of political theorists do the same, but with different remit. Some theorists envisage the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation. This we call the associative view of the political. Others understand it as a space of power and conflict, which we call the dissociative view. My understanding belongs to this second perspective. With the term ‘the political,’ I refer to the dimension of antagonism, which, I argue, is constitutive of human societies. Politics is the set of practices and institutions through which a certain order is created. This order organizes human coexistence in a context of conflict. According to the dissociative perspective, political questions always require decision making to choose between conflicting alternatives. And, contrary to the dominant view under neoliberalism today, those political decisions cannot be reduced to technical issues which can be solved by experts. In neoliberal societies, there is an incapacity to think politically. In this article, I will reflect upon the issue of public space and the potential of artistic practices in the context of conflict and antagonism.

1. THE POLITICAL

To a great extent the contemporary incapacity to think politically is not only caused by the uncontested hegemony of neoliberalism, but also by liberalism in general. With “liberalism,” I do not mean “economic liberalism,” which is the basis

of capitalism, nor “political liberalism,” as a set of political institutions, I refer here to the philosophical discourse, which has got many variances, some more progressive than others. Though there is no common essence, there is a multiplicity of what we could call, using an expression of Ludwig Wittgenstein, family resemblance. Save a few exceptions, the dominant tendency in liberal thought is characterised by a rationalist and individualist approach, which, in my view, is not able to adequately grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world with the conflicts that pluralism entails—conflicts for which there is no rational solution. The typical liberal understanding of pluralism is that we live in a world in which there are many perspectives, many values, and different beliefs. However, through serious deliberations and rational negotiations, these different perspectives can constitute harmonious and non-conflictual perspectives. This type of liberalism negates the political in its antagonistic dimension. One of its main tenets is a belief in the possibility of universal consensus, which can be established through strict rational reasoning. But to acknowledge the antagonism of the political underscores the inescapable moment of decision. I use ‘decision’ here in the Derridean sense. As Derrida insisted, to decide is always to decide in an undecidable terrain. A decision made after calculation, is not a decision at all. Decision-making in an undecidable terrain means choosing between alternatives that cannot be resolved through rational reasoning. The antagonism of the political reveals the limits of any rational consensus, and therefore is antithetical to the liberal vision.

When examining the different perspectives existing within contemporary liberal political thought, we can distinguish two main paradigms. The first is called the aggregative paradigm. There is a confluence with the associative view of the political, but it is not exactly the same. The aggregative view envisages politics as the establishment of a compromise between competing forces in society. Individual participants are portrayed as rational beings, driven by the maximization of their own interest. This is an instrumental understanding of acting; (it is) market ideology applied to the domain of politics. The instrumental view easily apprehends politics through economics and is often dominant in political science departments, for instance in the broadly accepted rational choice theory.

The second paradigm is dominant within philosophical discourses, and is often called the deliberative paradigm. Two of their representatives are John Rawls in the United States and Jürgen Habermas in Germany. They somehow developed their views in reaction to the instrumentalist model. Their argument is that there is more to politics than just the search for personal interests. Instead of an instrumental rationality, they

propose a communicative rationality, believing that it is possible to create a rational moral consensus by means of free discussion. In this case, politics is not apprehended through economics, but through ethics or morality. What these views leave aside through their rationalist approach is precisely what, to me, is the specificity of politics: the fact that in politics we are always dealing with a “we” as opposed to a “them.” This does not mean that antagonism is always present, but it is an ever-present possibility.

Another drawback of the rationalism of liberalism is that it is not able to acknowledge the crucial role played by what I call passions in politics. I refer here to the affective dimension, which is central to the constitution of any collective form of identification. Political identification is always collective, and this implies an affective dimension. Liberalism, with its methodological individualism, is not able to grasp the specificity of the political, the collective and the affective.

In my work, I argue that only when we acknowledge the political in its antagonistic dimension, can we pose the central question for democratic politics. This is not to question how to negotiate a compromise, or what kind of procedure is needed to reach a rational, fully inclusive consensus. It is impossible to establish a consensus without exclusion. Therefore, despite what many liberals want us to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not to overcome this “we/them” opposition, but how to construct this opposition to be compatible with the recognition of pluralism. In order to answer this question, I use the notion of the “constitutive outside,” a term proposed by the American philosopher Henry Staten in his book *Wittgenstein and Derrida*.² He uses this term to refer to a number of terms that are developed by Jacques Derrida, like Derrida’s notions of supplement, trace, and *différance*. The aim of those notions is to highlight the fact that the creation of an identity always implies the establishment of difference. This

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difference is moreover often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy, for instance man/woman, black/white. This view is based on Ferdinand de Saussure's claim that every identity is relational, and acknowledges that the affirmation of a difference is the precondition for the existence of any identity. In other words, the perception of something other that constitutes its exterior is the precondition of existence of an identity. If we accept this, and apply it to the field of politics, we can understand that the constitution of the "we" is what politics is about and that politics cannot exist without the determination of a "them." The identity of a "we" needs to have a constitutive outside, a "them." But this does not mean that such a relation is necessarily antagonistic.

In politics we thus deal with collective identities on the basis of "we/ them." Those differences can simply be a pure difference. To give an example: "we," the French, need to have a "them," the German. Or "we," the Catholic, and "them," the Protestant or the Muslim. This is not necessarily a relation of antagonism. But under certain conditions, this "we/them," can become an antagonism, and can be constructed on the basis of friend and enemy. This happens, for instance, when the "them" is perceived as questioning the identity of the "we," thus threatening its existence. From that moment on, any form of "we/them" relation, being from religious, ethnic, economic, or other origin, becomes antagonistic. An example that I often give to my students is the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The Slovenian, the Bosnian, the Croat and the Serb were not enemies, but in certain circumstances, such as those in the death of Tito and the coming to power of Milošević, who tried to establish Serbian supremacy, they began to see each other as enemies. Their relationship became antagonistic. This is important to realize, the ever-present possibility that "we/them" relations become antagonistic.

Upon that remark, I would like to stress that identities are always a result of processes of identification. Identities, as Freud claims, can never be completely fixed. Therefore, we are never confronted with "we/them" opposition that expresses essentialist pre-existing identities. This is an important point to stress, since the "them" represent the condition of possibility of the "we," as I argued above. This means that the constitution of a specific "we" always depends on the type of "them" from which it is differentiated. The crucial point is that this allows us to envisage the possibility of a different type of "we/them" relation according to the way the "them" is constructed.

Since all forms of political identities entail a "we/them" distinction, this means that the possibility of emergence of antagonism can never be eliminated. I thus assert that the political belongs to our ontological

condition. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and I argue that next to the concept of antagonism, there is another concept which is crucial to address the political: the concept of hegemony.³ To acknowledge the dimension of the political, the ever-present possibility of antagonism, requires coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order. It requires recognizing what we call the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order. Every society is the product of a series of practices which attempt to establish an order in a specific context. But this context is always contingent. It is important to realise that according to such a conception, society cannot be seen as the unfolding of a logic that will be exterior to itself, whatever the source of this logic will be — the forces of production for Marx, nor the development of the spirit for Hegel. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. This means that things could always have been otherwise and that every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. To acknowledge this can also be called political: it is always the expression of a particular structure of power relations. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed, but that can also be reactivated. Every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order, to install another form of hegemony. This is what the agonistic struggle is about: the struggle between hegemonies.

The political is linked to those acts of hegemonic institution, and in this sense can be differentiated from the social. This distinction between the social and political is important. These two domains are two different ways of looking at the same thing. The social is the basis of ‘sedimented practices’, referring to practices that conceal the act of the contingent political institution. These practices appear as if they were self-grounded. Or to put it differently,

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we take these practices for granted. There is a need for such sedimented practices, as you cannot have everything in perpetual flux. The social and the political have the status of what Martin Heidegger called ‘existentials,’ which are the necessary forms of societal life.

2. ON PUBLIC SPACES

Once the ever-present possibility of antagonism is acknowledged, one can understand why one of the main tasks of democratic politics consists in defusing the potential antagonism that exists in social relations. A society cannot exist in constant flux or civil war. There is a need for some form of stability. If we accept that this stability cannot be achieved by transcending the “we/them” relation, but only by constructing it in a different way, then the following question arises: what could constitute a tame relation, a sublimated form of antagonism? What form of “we/them” will this imply? Or to put it differently, how could conflict be accepted as legitimate and take a form that does not destroy the political association? This requires that some kind of common bond exists between the parties in conflict so that they will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated. That would be a form of civil war, because they will see their demands as illegitimate. This is precisely what happens in an antagonistic enemy relation. However, the opponents cannot be seen simply as competitors whose interests can be dealt with either through negotiation, the aggregative conception, or reconciled by deliberation (the deliberative view). In that case, the antagonistic element will simply have been eliminated. The two solutions offered by liberalism are not adequate, precisely because they do not recognise the inevitable dimension of antagonism and the fact of the hegemonic conception of society. If we thus want to acknowledge on one side the inevitability of the antagonistic dimension, while on the other allowing for the possibility of its sublimation, of its taming, we need to envisage a third type of relation. And this is the type of relation that I have proposed to call agonism.

Antagonism is a “we/them” relation in which the two sides are enemies, wherein these two sides do not share any common ground. There is no symbolic space among them. Agonism is also a “we/them” relation with conflicting parties. However, with agonism, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, the two sides recognise the legitimacy of their opponents. They are adversaries, not enemies. This means that when in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association. They are sharing a common symbolic space and it is within this space that the conflict takes place. What exists among them is a conflictual consensus. They have different interpretations of the shared political values.

What is at stake in agonistic struggle is in fact the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured. It is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects, which cannot be reconciled rationally. The antagonistic dimension is always present, it is a real confrontation, but one which is played out under regulated conditions by democratic procedures. The agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic political-economic articulation, which informs a specific configuration of a society at a given moment. This is a precarious and pragmatic construction, which can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle among the adversaries. Contrary to the values of the liberal model, the agonistic approach recognises that society is always politically instituted. It never forgets that the terrain in which the hegemonic intervention takes place is necessarily the outcome of previous hegemonic practices. This is why the agonistic model denies the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics and criticises those who, by ignoring this dimension of the political, reduce politics to a set of supposedly technical moves and neutral procedures. Unfortunately, the latter is the dominant view in the neoliberal hegemonic, as I stated previously.

The most important consequence of the agonistic model of democracy for the issue of public space is that this conception challenges the widespread notions that inform most liberal visions, wherein public space is regarded as the terrain where consensus could possibly be reached. For the agonistic model, public spaces are the battlefields where different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation. In this view, we are not dealing with one single public space. According to the hegemonic approach, public spaces are always plural. The agonistic confrontation takes place in a multiplicity of discursive surfaces. The second important point I want to make is that

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while there is no underlying principle of unity, no predetermined centre to this diversity of spaces, there always exist diverse forms of articulation amongst them. We are not faced with the dispersion envisaged by some modernist thinkers. This is, for instance, the big difference between our approach and the one of Michel Foucault. Many parts of our previously mentioned book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* are influenced by Foucault, such as the conception of power. But we part company with Foucault when he asserts the pure multiplicity of public spaces. We argue, on the contrary, that public spaces are always hegemonically structured. Given the fact that hegemony results from the specific articulation of a diversity of spaces, this means that the hegemonic struggle always consists in the attempt to create a different form of articulation.

This not only differentiates our view from Foucault's, it is also differentiated from Jürgen Habermas's view, who reflected a lot about the political public space. When he envisages a public sphere, Habermas presents it as a place where deliberation aiming at the rational consensus takes place. To be sure, Habermas accepts that it is improbable that such a consensus could effectively be reached, given the limitation of social life. He therefore presents this consensus, this ideal situation of communication, as a regulative idea. I would argue that this is, though slightly different, fundamentally the same conception. According to the perspective that I am advocating, the impediments to Habermas's ideal speech situation are not empirical. For Habermas, we would never be able to reach it, because we will never be able to completely coincide with our rational self, to leave aside all our particularities. The impediments are therefore empirical. To me, however, those impediments are not empirical, they are ontological. And the rational consensus that Habermas presents as a regulative idea is, in my view, a conceptual impossibility.

My idea of agonistic public space also differs from Hannah Arendt's. In my view, the main problem with Arendt's understanding of agonism is, to put it in a nutshell, that it is an agonism without antagonism. Arendt puts a great emphasis on plurality and insists that politics deals with the community and reciprocity of human beings which are different from one another. This is essential to her view. But she never acknowledges that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts. According to Arendt, to think politically is to develop the ability to see things from a multiplicity of perspectives. In a reference to Immanuel Kant, in her book *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, she refers to his idea of enlarged thought.⁴ For Arendt, this idea is a model of political practices, which testifies that her conception of pluralism is in fact inscribed in the horizon of an intersubjective agreement. What Arendt looks for in Kant's doctrine

of aesthetic judgment is in fact a procedure for ascertaining intersubjective agreement in the public space. This is why I will argue that while significant differences in their respective approaches exist, Arendt and Habermas both end up envisaging the public space as one free from antagonism. Both belong to the associative conception of politics, which is distinct from the dissociative conception of politics that I advocate.

3. ON ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE

So far, I have argued that by bringing to the fore the discursive character of the social and the multiplicity of discursive practices through which our world is constructed, the hegemonic approach is particularly fruitful when it comes to apprehending the relation between art and politics. This relation should not be envisaged in terms of two separate constituted fields, art on one side, politics on the other, between which a relation will need to be established. According to this approach there is an aesthetic dimension in the political and a political dimension in art. Indeed, from the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic and cultural practices play a role in the constitution and the maintenance of a given symbolic order, as well as in challenging this hegemonic order. And this is why artistic and cultural practices necessarily have a political dimension. This is why I have suggested that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. I therefore prefer to speak about critical art. Identifying the critical to the political implies that all artistic practices that are not critical are not political either. But, as said, there is a political dimension in all forms of art. The importance of the hegemonic approach for critical art is that it highlights the fact that the construction of a hegemony is not limited to the traditional political institutions, but that it also takes place in a multiplicity of spaces, which are usually called

“IT IS NOT USEFUL TO MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN POLITICAL AND NON-POLITICAL ART.”

civil society. This is where, as Antonio Gramsci has shown, a particular conception of the world is established and a specific understanding of reality is defined—what he calls the common sense. This common sense provides the terrain in which specific forms of subjectivity are constructed. Gramsci insists that the domain of culture plays a crucial role there, as it is one of the terrains where common sense is built and subjectivities are created.

This hegemonic approach reveals that artistic practices constitute an important terrain for the construction of political identities. It allows us to grasp the decisive role that those practices could also play in the counter-hegemonic struggle, because they contribute to the emergence of new forms of subjectivity. An important dimension of the counter-hegemonic struggle is indeed the transformation of the common sense as the space where specific forms of subjectivity are constructed. From this perspective, critical art is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices that are going to contribute to question the dominant hegemony. The objective is a transformation of political identities through the creation of new practices, new language games, that will mobilize affects in a way that allows for the disarticulation of the framework in which current forms of identification are taking place. As such, artistic practices allow other forms of identification to emerge.

It is worth indicating that there are different answers to the question of what critical art is. In fact, it is important to acknowledge that not all conceptions of radical politics envisage the criticality of artistic practices in the same way. We can, I would like to argue, roughly distinguish two main strategies to visualize radical politics, one that I have in my book *Agonistics* called ‘engagement with’ and the other ‘desertion from.’⁵ The second one, which is promoted by thinkers like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and their followers, reject any engagement with the state and all existing institutions. In their recent work, Hardt and Negri have moved a bit from that view, but most of their followers have not. The strategy that they advocate is one of exodus, that calls for the desertion of the places of power, which is justified by the claim that under the current condition of cognitive capitalism, exodus is the only form of resistance to the domination of bio-power. Desertion should include the institutions of the art world, which they see as totally instrumentalized by the creative industries. The art world has become complicit with capitalism, and thus can no longer provide a site of resistance.

Against this view of radical politics in terms of exodus, the strategy that the hegemonic approach advocates, is one that, again borrowing a term from Gramsci, we call a “war of positions.” It does not consist

in withdrawing from existing institutions, but by engaging with them in order to bring about a profound transformation in the way they function. This war of positions targets the nodal points around which neoliberal hegemony is established, disarticulating the key discourses and practices through which neoliberal hegemony is sustained and reproduced. It thus consists of the diversity of counter-hegemonic practices and interventions, which operates in a multiplicity of domains: economic, legal, political, and cultural. The domain of culture plays a crucial role in this war of positions, because this is the space where the common sense is established and subjectivities are constructed. Critical artistic and cultural practices can contribute to the fostering of an agonistic confrontation by making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. This permits challenges to the existing hegemony. I want to insist that this can be done in a diversity of ways, in a multiplicity of interventions and in active engagement with a wide range of institutions in a variety of spaces. There are many terrains in which artistic and cultural practices can unsettle the established common sense and contribute to the emergence of new forms of subjectivity.

But what about architecture? Can it be critical as well? Recognizing the role of cultural artistic practices in the construction of a hegemony contributes to visualising the role that architectural practices could play in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of a hegemony. The possibility of a critical architecture starts with the acknowledgment that the social is always discursively constructed and that architecture also has a political dimension. However, it is one thing to recognize its political dimension, another to determine whether this political dimension is critical. As I have stated previously, the political does not equate with the critical. Once we can recognize the political dimension of architecture,

“THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE STARTS WITH THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT THE SOCIAL IS ALWAYS DISCURSIVELY CONSTRUCTED AND THAT ARCHITECTURE ALSO HAS A POLITICAL DIMENSION.”

we can follow different strategies to guide this political dimension. What strategy will then orient us in a critical direction? The strategy that Laclau and I advocated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the strategy that I still advocate in my book, *For a Left Populism*, is a strategy of critical engagement with institutions in order to transform them.⁶ This is a matter of both the disarticulation of a given hegemony, as well as the importance of creating something new. A critical approach always consists of a double movement, of disarticulation and rearticulation.

It seems to me that this strategy of “engagement with” is particularly suited to critical architectural practices. Moreover, I cannot really think of architectural practices that correspond to a strategy of exodus. In architecture, one is always, it seems to me, dealing with presentation, construction, and mediation, and those are precisely the things that the exodus strategy rejects.

ENDNOTES

1. This article is a lightly edited transcript of Chantal Mouffe’s keynote lecture at the *5th Biennial Conference of the International Society of the Philosophy of Architecture* (ISPA), held via Zoom at Monte Verita, Ascona, Switzerland, on July 4th, 2021.
2. Henri Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).
3. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards Radical Democratic Politics* (London/New York: Verso, 2001).
4. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
5. Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically* (London/New York: Verso, 2013).
6. Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE WITHIN THE MEGALOPOLIS: ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE- POLITICS OF SÃO PAULO 1957-2017

KENNETH FRAMPTON

There is perhaps no more compelling example of Hannah Arendt's "space of appearance" than Lina Bo Bardi's Museum of Art in São Paulo, MASP, designed in 1957 for the Assis Chateaubriand art collection previously housed in an old downtown building. Although the work of the Italian émigré architect Lina Bo Bardi was always independent of the so-called Paulista School, the audaciously monumental structure of her museum, suspended clear of the ground from two deep, long span reinforced concrete beams resting on four equally gigantic reinforced concrete piers, served to create a partially covered terrace, opening off the Avenida Paulista and overlooking the verdant landscape of Trianon Park. Ever since its completion in 1968 which happened to coincide with the worldwide student revolt, this space has served as the ultimate Paulista symbolic site for spontaneous political demonstrations. As an Arendtian cultural nexus with a similar political potential Bo Bardi's museum will be matched at virtually the same time by a top-lit, equally monumental core incorporated into the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism built on the campus of São Paulo University to designs of the architect João Vilanova Artigas, between 1959 and 1961. The result, in both instances was the creation of a *res publica* that corresponded, however inadvertently, to Arendt's concept of "the space of appearance," as first defined by her under the rubric *work* in her magnum opus *The Human Condition* of 1958:

The manmade world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*, becomes a home

for immortal men, stability of which will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions, only inasmuch as it transcends the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use. Life in its non-biological sense, the span of time each man has between birth and death, manifests itself in action and speech...If the *animal laborans* needs the help of the *homo faber* to ease his labor and remove his pain, and if mortals need his help to erect a home on earth, acting and speaking men need the help of *homo faber* in his highest capacity, that is the help of artists, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. In order to be what the world is always meant to be, home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced.¹

Although Arendt never alludes to the megalopolis *per se*, which in any case in the late 50's had yet to be acknowledged this is the "placeless" landscape she foresees in *The Human Condition* when, in the fifth chapter, she defines the "space of appearance" in the following terms:

The space of appearance comes into being whenever men are gathered together in a manner of speech and action and therefore precedes all formal constitution of the public realm...Only where potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them and the foundation of cities which, as city states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization is therefore the most important prerequisite for power...Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance and as such it is the life blood of the human artifice... Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was free to add one more object... without the enduring permanence of the human artifice there cannot be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after...²

And it is also much the same megapolitan landscape she has in mind when in her later critique of consumerism, she writes:

In our need for more and more rapid replacement of worldly things around us we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability, we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the good things of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man's metabolism with nature. It is as though we had forced open the distinguishing boundaries which protected the world, the human artifice, from nature, the biological processes which goes on in its very midst as well as the natural cyclical processes which surround it delivering and abandoning to them the always threatened stability of the human world.³

In the last chapter of *The Human Condition*, entitled the 'Vita Activa and the Modern Age,' Arendt touches on the socio-economic consequences of the mass ownership of the car without which the demise of the city and the emergence of the megalopolis would not have been possible.

If, in concluding, we return once more to the Archimedian point and apply it, as Kafka warned us not to do, to man himself and to what he is doing to this earth, it at once becomes manifest that all of his activities, watched from a sufficiently removed vantage point in the universe, would appear not as activities of any kind but as processes, so that as a scientist recently put it, modern motorization would appear like a process of biological mutation which human bodies gradually begin to be covered by shells of steel. For the watcher from the universe, this mutation would be no more or less mysterious than the mutation which now goes on before our eyes in those small living organisms which we fought with antibiotics and which mysteriously have developed new strains to resist us...we live

“ALTHOUGH ARENDT NEVER ALLUDES TO THE MEGALOPOLIS, THIS IS SURELY THE PLACELESS LANDSCAPE SHE FORESEES IN THE HUMAN CONDITION.”

in this society as though we were as far removed from our own human existence as we are from the infinitely small and the infinitely large which, even if they could be perceived by the finest instruments, are too far away from us to be experienced.⁴

The Arendtian ideal of the city-state was not only predicated on the remote model of the ancient Greek *polis* but also on the or worker's councils that emerged spontaneously in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, only to be instantly suppressed by the triumphant Bolsheviki party. Arendt's other example of council formation were the groups formed during the Hungarian Revolt of 1956, which she equally admired and which were also summarily suppressed. Perhaps no one has understood Arendt's concept of direct democracy better than Shmuel Lederman in his study *Hannah Arendt and Participatory Democracy* of 2019 wherein he wrote:

Ultimately, the different way Arendt conceptualized the meaning and the potential of the councils emanated not so much from historical idiosyncrasies as from the different ontological and epistemological foundations of her political thought namely from the way she "politicized" German existentialism and used Heidegger's phenomenological method to offer a strikingly original analysis of the experience of action and speech in the public sphere.⁵

Later, Lederman cites two recent examples of participatory democracy: first, the Indian state of Kerala, which, had, in the past, been under a democratically elected communist government and second, the city of Porto Alegre in the South of Brazil. Of this last Lederman writes:

... In the spirit of the council tradition, participatory budgeting in Puerta Alegre continually challenged the very structure of hegemonic representative democracy...participatory institutions now play a role channeling demands emerging from organized communities;...the blurring between state and society occurs as government officials and community leaders now occupy a space within state institutions...(in recent years 100,000 residents have taken part) in a process prioritizing public works, such as street paving, the laying of water and sewerage lines, the building of new schools and hospitals and so on.⁶

As the title of this essay intimates, "spaces of appearance," in a cultural if not an overtly political sense, have intermittently appeared over the

years within the exceptionally vast and placeless megalopolis of São Paulo. Such spaces have been an intrinsic part of the urban culture of São Paulo since the foundation of the SESC organization (the Serviço Social do Comércio; EN: Social Service of Commerce) in 1945, which was conceived from the outset as providing a certain sector of workers with beneficial social, recreational and cultural facilities. The socio-cultural agenda of this welfare provision was first given an architectural formulation in the so-called SESC Pompeia designed by Lina Bo Bardi in 1977, in collaboration with Marcelo Ferraz. This work entailed the conversion of a disused, single story factory in the center of the city into a complex combining multiple facilities, including an 800-seat restaurant, a reading room, a library, a 750-seat theatre and a dental clinic. Bo Bardi would add to this same complex a new multi-story sports center, housing among other facilities a gymnasium and indoor swimming pool. This new addition was built out of exposed, in situ reinforced concrete in manner of Le Corbusier's *béton brut*. Its multi-story, silo-like form, linked by ramps to a concrete access tower, was given an industrial character so as to appear as if it had always existed in relation to the original single-story, monitor-lit factory. The interstitial space between the two was landscaped in such a way as to provide a nominal, artificial "beach" in which users could sun bathe.

This achievement was echoed in 2017 by the realization of another SESC complex within the São Paulo megalopolis; the so-called SESC 24 de Maio built to the designs of the late Paulista architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who collaborated with one of his former pupils, Maria Moreira, a founding partner in the practice, MMBB. Here again we have the of SESC commissioning the re-use of an existing structure, this time a disused department store which since it was largely ruined had to be extensively rebuilt. Apart from providing the usual mix of SESC amenities, the entire work was predicated on the

““SPACES OF APPEARANCE,” IN A CULTURAL IF NOT AN OVERTLY POLITICAL SENSE, HAVE BEEN AN INTRINSIC PART OF THE URBAN CULTURE OF SÃO PAULO SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE SESC ORGANIZATION IN 1945.””

heroic idea of building a large swimming pool on top of an existing 13-story structure. This daring engineering concept was predicated on supporting the pool and the rest of the building on four gigantic reinforced concrete columns, each measuring 1.2 meters in diameter. These four columns were centered on the four corners of a square, set within the virtual square of the original building with a continuous pedestrian access ramp rising up to one side of the column grid. The pool on the roof was surely a manifest improvement on the narrow “urban beach” which had been a key feature in the SESC Pompeia. The *raison d’être* behind this seemingly counter-intuitive decision to place the heavy weight of the pool at the top of the building would be accounted for by the architect in the following:

The pool chooses its place not the architect. A sunny, open pool, despite the winter, is completely different from a closed, heated pool. My image is Copacabana, Leblon, Ipanema!⁷

In a conversation with the Chilean architect Enrique Walker in 2018, Mendes da Rocha will make the ideological stratagem of the Paulista School of Architecture explicit, in his response to Walker’s question as to the political implications of the SESC 24 de Maio, when he remarked:

Every project is a political statement. The project idea is one of projection of the future. So, the intention is to imagine what we should be, what we can be. The design is not simply a matter of architecture... Generally speaking, society throughout the world is exclusive, in principle. It always protects itself from free public action: these are the famous gated communities, the buildings with security. We made this building open to public use as much as possible. And SESC comes into that as well, which tells us something about SESC policies. So, everything we do has a political value; there is a political essence in the idea of decision. And the new occupation of an existing building is part of a very interesting policy linked to the economy. You are better off reusing buildings rather than discarding them ... Every construction, every action of ours has value, a political essence, which must be read between the lines of what is there... in architecture in particular, the first thing it entails is to seduce others so that they can see the dimensions of what, despite the circumstances we must do.⁸

Among the architects practicing in São Paulo over the last half of the 20th century there has perhaps been no figure who has been more aware of the profound challenges posed by the São Paulo megalopolis, now covering a

million square kilometers with a population of 30 million people, than Paulo Mendes da Rocha. As he put it at an earlier moment when the population stood at 20 million: “it would have better to have built ten cities of 2 million each.” For Mendes da Rocha the megalopolis has been a challenge that can only be significantly addressed by creating public spaces, within which to resist the overwhelmingly disjunctive “non-place” of the megalopolis, not only in terms of culture-politics but also psychologically. Hence his penchant for creating microcosmic public realms such as his *Poupa Tempo*, the so-called “time-saving” building realized in the center of the city in 2008. The Swiss architect Annette Spiro’s appraisal of this work encapsulates the ennobling quality of this mutual interface between the general public and the municipality; a building that in effect serves as a range of offices for the granting of licenses and the payment of rates, taxes and fees, etc. In her view: “what could have easily been a labyrinth of bureaucracy is exactly the opposite; a singular 300-meter-long space, a bridge, an airy hall, an elongated public square...By virtue of one grand gesture, urbanistic, functional and spatial intentions are cogently satisfied.”

In this one work one is able to appreciate fully the underlying ideology of the São Paulo school of architecture as this was initially envisaged by the architect, João Vilanova Artigas and the historian-theorist, Flavio Motta; that is to say the accommodation of socio-cultural and politically progressive programs within the fabric of tectonically articulated, monumental form. It is this that surely accounts for Mendes da Rocha’s assertion that engineering and architecture should be one and the same, although he would be the first to concede that this tectonic ethos is not, in and of itself, able to serve as an adequate point of departure before the dystopic fragmentation of the megalopolis for, as he would put it: “A city’s memory is not a continuous accumulation of eternities. It can only be preserved

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in its historical discontinuity. We have to have the courage to face this inevitable discontinuity and turn it into stimulus.”¹⁰

In this regard Mendes da Rocha’s capacity to imagine and create spaces of public appearance would be particularly challenged in 2000 when he received from both Rio de Janeiro and Paris separate commissions to design sports facilities as part of their rival bids to host the Olympic games of 2008. What is significant about these two quite different proposals, with the one much more extensive and ambitious than the other, is that they were both designed for the worldwide megalopoli, i.e. for universal placelessness just as prevalent in the urbanistic chaos surrounding the Hausmannian core of Paris, as it is throughout the vast extent of the São Paulo megalopolis and where the one would consist of a number of different interventions on multiple sites, the other consisted of a single large stadium related to a pre-existing canal and podium of smaller stadia accommodating various specialized sports, i.e. the so-called “sports boulevard.” What Mendes da Rocha had to say about his various proposals for the urbanized region of São Paulo emphasizes the potential opportunity provided by the games as an incentive for the reconstruction of city form. As he would write of his piecemeal project of repairing the degradation of megalopolitan fabric around São Paulo:

... It proposes to intervene in places that today, despite their effective urban structuring are nonetheless degraded, as happens in all the world’s dynamic cities, with railway stations, unwanted polluted waterways and unexpected empty lots. Thus, the proposal envisages the urbanization of abandoned areas, weaving houses, with new leisure, health and education facilities right into the existing urban fabric.¹¹

There are perhaps no two works from the middle of the last century having more disparate implications than Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* of 1958 and Jean Gottman’s *Megalopolis* of 1962 for while Arendt’s concept of “the space of appearance” may be seen in retrospect as being of importance for the practice of architecture, Gottman’s relevance resided in the fact that he was the first to recognize that the urbanized region was already an emergent and universal condition. This, is ever more the case today as we veer towards the urbanization of 75% of world’s population by 2050, according to the three-volume study *The Endless City*, published by the London School of Economics in 2007. In this regard, it may well be that Brazil in general and São Paulo in particular proffer a range of socio-cultural interventions that are of particular pertinence today given the inevitable wholesale urbanization of the planet. I have in mind in the first instance

the extraordinary capacity of Paulista municipality to build a large number of school-cum-community centers for the poorest sectors of society. There is surely no school building program of comparable stature and speed of realization anywhere else in the world today. This exceptional achievement suggests that even under globalized capitalism there is much to be said for the potential of the city state or the urbanized region to overcome the political ‘non-place’ of the megalopolis in its most alienated form. This much seems to be implied by Chantal Mouffe’s recent thesis of *Agonistics*, first published in 2013 as a political stratagem to overcome the current impasse of representational democracy. In this she cites with approval the political philosophy of the Italian intellectual, Massimo Cacciari, who having served twice as the mayor of Venice, recommends a future policy in which he advocates “federation from the bottom” as opposed to the current union of European nation states which although they derive from representational democracies, are nonetheless subject to the top-down regulatory power of the European Union. In her appraisal of Cacciari’s thesis, Mouffe writes:

What Cacciari advocates can be conceived as a type of federal union in which the component units would not be limited to nation states and in which the regions would also play an important role. From the point of view of an agnostic model for Europe, I find particularly interesting his claim that such a union would manifest a form of autonomy exercised in systems which are integrated in a conflictive mode, and that it would combine solidarity and competition. Incorporating Cacciari’s proposals, we could imagine a European Union that would not only be a demio-cracy composed of nation states, but one where there would be a multiplicity of different kinds of demio, where democracy could be exercised at different levels and in a

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multiplicity of ways. Such a view recognizes and articulates different forms of collective identities and their new modes of co-operation.¹²

Of equal consequence as “spaces of appearance” has been the exemplary policy pursued by the city during the first decade of the 21st century wherein it would realize an extensive program of school building throughout the far-flung periphery of the city, situating these schools in the midst of center-less *favelas*, that is in the heart of spontaneous, self-built housing settlements, dating back from the 60’s, as they are to be found throughout the fringes of the city. Twenty-one such schools were built by the city under the mayoralty of Marta Suplicy who was affiliated with Lula da Silva Worker’s Party during his first presidency, 2003-2010. Since then another twenty-five schools-cum-community centers have been built under the rubric of Centros Educacionais Unificados (EN: Unified Educational Centers) or CEUS. These large complexes incorporate a wide range of supplementary social services including theatres, cinemas, sports facilities, nursery schools, kindergartens, vocational high schools, dance halls, swimming pools, clinics, etc. CEUS were also conceived as accommodating university extension courses which would be coordinated by the Federal Government. Largely designed by the architect’s department of municipality under the leadership of Alexandre Delijacov, André Takia and Wanderley Ariza, these educational complexes now distributed throughout the periphery of the city constitute potential “spaces of appearance” in a political sense.

All of this incorporates, in so many respects, the essence of Paulista architectural culture-politics made manifest throughout the conurbation, notwithstanding the traumatic political changes to which Brazil has been subjected over the past seven decades. In this regard it is significant when it comes to the megalopolitan proliferation of free-standing objects it is significant that Mendes da Rocha invariably worked at two different scales; on the one hand, at the scale of microcosmic intervention, such as his *Poupa Tempo* building or his Arc of the Patriarch of 2007 and, on the other, at the continental scale of the territory at large. A measure of this was evoked by Mendes da Rocha in his 1980 proposal for the regularization of the Bay of Montevideo in Uruguay of which he wrote:

The straightened lengths of the bay front are focused on the water, and provide new recreation areas in the form of gardens, plazas, theatres, cinemas, cafes, restaurants. Transformed into a city square on water, 3 km across between Cerrito Hill and the harbor and lying between different city districts and centers, the bay bustles with light passenger traffic and makes a lively and sophisticated impression. At a remote

and delightfully situated point in the bay a tiny island was transformed into a theatre, after the manner of the Venetians. Perhaps one night an inexpressibly haunting melody from its shores will linger over the city. Who knows it would be even like Villa-Lobos's, Floresta do Amazonas.¹³

However improbable and costly such a modification would have been, it would have afforded a new territorial datum capable of unifying the placeless megalopolis surrounding the Bay of Montevideo throughout its perimeter. It is of the utmost importance that the architect should have conceived of his intervention in terms of giving rise to auditoria and their attendant "spaces of appearance" without which architecture, as the most material of the arts, has no socio-political cultural significance.

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ENDNOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Second Edition), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 173-174.
2. Ibid., 199-200.
3. Ibid., 125, 126.
4. Ibid., 322, 323.
5. Shmuel Lederman, *Hannah Arendt and Participatory Democracy. A Peoples Utopia* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 185.
6. Ibid., 200.
7. Andres Lepak and Daniel Talesnik, *Access for All. São Paulo's Architectural Infrastructures* (Zurich: Park Books, 2019), 189.
8. Lepak and Talesnik, *Access for All*, 193.
9. Annette Spiro, *Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Works and Projects* (Zurich: Niggli, 2002), 27.
10. Rosa Artigas, *Paulo Mendez da Rocha, 50 years*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2007) 24.
11. Ibid., 85.
12. Chantal Mouffe, *Agnostics* (London: Verso, 2013), 53.
13. Spiro, *Paulo Mendes da Rocha*, 162.



DISNEYLAND PARIS (2021)

A SITE OF STRUGGLE. AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET CRAWFORD

HANS TEERDS

The world of the shopping mall has become a template for the whole world, Margaret Crawford, a Professor of Architecture and Urban Design and Director of the Department of Urban Design at Berkeley, concluded in her 1992 contribution to *Variations on a Theme Park*.¹ The book, edited by the architect Michael Sorkin, offers a collection of alarming articles, investigating how commercial interests, economic principles, and consumerist perspectives shape contemporary cities. Sorkin presents it apocalyptically: ‘the end of public space.’ As he announces in his introduction: this is an alarming perspective, as public space is directly related to the issue of democracy, the interaction, the possibility of protests, the proximity of otherness, the existence of fringes.² Crawford’s opening article examines the development and features of malls and mall life. Her concluding argument is made up out of the observation that also existing cities and their downtowns, even such classical and medieval cities as Florence and Rouen, as well as public or cultural venues, like museums, transform according to mall logics. The conclusion fits well in the book, as it underlines the narrative of loss. What if the whole world transforms along the lines of mall principles?

Crawford is amongst the rare thinkers that are able to publicly rethink and criticize the own conclusions. A few years after her contribution to *Variations on a Theme Park*, she published an article in the *Journal of Architectural Education* wherein she clearly distances herself from the narrative of loss which had influenced her work previously. In “Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles over Public Space in Los Angeles” she writes that this idea of

loss is “derived from extremely narrow and normative definitions of both public and space,” while, “the meaning of concepts such as public, space, democracy, and citizenship are continually being redefined in practice through lived experience.”³ In the article she not only propels to approach consumerist spaces less pessimistically, but also writes about other practices of consumption less defined by the principles of capitalism, and closer to an everyday occupation of public life, such as street vending. This perspective she makes even more clear in the important book *Everyday Urbanism*, which she edited together with John Chase and John Kaliski.⁴ Her own contribution to this book, the article “Blurring the Boundaries,” underlines how everyday spaces are still spaces of struggle, occupation, adaptation, and appropriation.⁵ As such these spaces still raise important political questions about both citizenship and economic participation. This perspective thus is much more optimistic about the vitality of public space as stage of the political dimension of the world. From “Contesting the Public Realm” onwards, the work of Crawford is clearly based on new insight, a new perception of the world which is more hopeful and less pessimistic. In this the following interview, I questioned Crawford on this moment of change in her thinking: how does she look back on her contribution to *Variations on a Theme Park*, why did she change her mind, and how does she read the situation of public space today?

MC: The tone of my original article was hugely influenced by Michael Sorkin. When I was asked to contribute, the working title of the book was *Variations on a Theme Park: Scenes From the New American City*. This was a very non-judgmental title, a survey of what was happening in the American urban landscape. Later, the subtitle was changed to *The End of Public Space*, a title that did not sit well with me. However, Michael encouraged every contributor to have a pessimistic and even a slightly apocalyptic take on what we were investigating. There were two important philosophers who were influencing the debate at the time: Jean Baudrillard, with his concept of hyperreality, and Jürgen Habermas, with his idea of the loss of the public sphere.

In the article I contributed to the volume, public space does not play an important part. The real contribution of that article to contemporary discourse is the discussion of the financing and organization of mall development.

While preparing the article, I went to many shopping malls, pretty much nonstop, for several months. It was at the high point of shopping mall development in the United States and Canada, the early nineties were a prosperous decade of consumption in the US. Visiting all these

malls definitely shaped my perception, as well as my conclusion that the mall had conquered the entire world. Once you get engaged in this narrative of loss, you don't see signs that something else is happening. Lots of changes were lurking slightly under the surface, and I didn't see them. But what I recognized in that narrative is that the mall concept, in which scripting and theming played an important role, was also expanding beyond the mall, to other domains of commercial and cultural life. Scripting and theming, for instance, became part of the design of museums and airports too.

The concern about these mechanisms applied to public space and cultural venues is a concern about authenticity and authentic experiences. But once you start thinking about what is real and what is fantasy, the entire concept of authenticity vanishes. It is actually a moral response, an upper-middle-class concern that they used to differentiate themselves as informed and aware people who don't go to malls and spurn Disneyland, from the rest of the populace, who enjoy them. It is an apparently leftist critique that actually serves to maintain class distinctions. I now read my contribution to *Variations on a Theme Park* as a response to a particular moment in time, influenced by a particular kind of leftist alarm, a moral panic about what was going on in the built environment. It was written in an ambience linked to inexorable narratives of consumerism, exploding marketing and a constantly expanding capitalism. In this situation, it is assumed that there is nothing you can do, except write critical articles.

But soon after my article, the circumstances changed. Slowly but slightly, still continuing until today, many malls have become obsolete and have been demolished. New malls are rarely being built. Over the past decade, this change has certainly been propelled with the increase of online shopping. However, this trend also has led to a paradoxical new appreciation of the mall, because many people now go to malls more for public interaction rather

“THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSUMPTION AND PUBLIC LIFE SEEMS TO BE CHANGING DRAMATICALLY.”

than to actually buy something. Physical shopping can be understood as a positive force shaping public space, as compared to online shopping from home. So, the actual meaning of the relationship between consumption and public life seems to be changing dramatically. But this does not mean that I am less concerned about the privatization of public space. There are still urban spaces being developed and built where commerce dominates public space. Take for instance the Hudson Yards in New York, or in Los Angeles, The Americana at Brand, which are, I would argue, a new typology of shopping mall: open air shopping spaces with housing above the shops. It differs from historic downtown districts or the medieval centers of cities in Europe, where people also lived (and still live) above shops in shopping streets. But where these streets are part and parcel of a continuous urban public space, the urban fabric, these new spaces are detached from the surrounding urban spaces. As such, these spaces still follow the mall typology. The residents of the apartments thus are really living within the confines of the shopping mall. Their public space is totally commercialized. How do they experience these spaces, I wonder? Do they accept it as their own town square? This new typology does show that privatization has not stopped at all. In fact, Hudson Yards is an extreme example of privatization.

HT: This example of the new mall typology shows that the concern about the totalizing impact of commercialization on public space is still valid and urgent. Nevertheless, you also maintain that the mall can actually provide a public space, which is meaningful for particular groups in society. How did you change your view upon malls? And how did that also urge you to examine public life and commercial activities in actual streets, outside malls?

MC: There were several reasons. One was a critique of my mall article by philosopher Marshall Berman. He simply said: 'she's never been shopping.' That was not true at all! As I visited malls for professional reasons, I also enjoyed them as a shopper. Every time I went to a mall, I came out with a bag in my hand. Berman's critique showed me that my allegedly objective analysis actually discounted my own experience in malls. This led me to think more about different mall experiences. I also read feminist political philosophers, such as Nancy Fraser. Her critique of Habermas's idea of the public sphere emphasizes the existence of multiple publics and the impossibility of a single all-embracing 'public.'⁶ This leads to the idea that there is no universal public space, but many publics and many spaces. I realized that malls are different for different groups. Some offer a safe space for mothers with children and others are great hangouts for teenagers.

Security and safety are issues of great concern to these groups. The universal, male-oriented concept of public space that is the dominant perspective in *Variations on a Theme Park*, overlooks and dismisses this important dimension of malls.

It also became clear to me that that mall-life cannot be reduced to just consuming. Malls offer many different types of publicness. I understood that part of the problem with my previous reading of mall life was the very modernist dichotomy or binary between public and private. But there are many gradations of publicness and privateness. If you accept this spectrum, you start to see how the mall provides a quasi-public space. It has dimensions of publicness, as well as of privateness. The moment you accept the mall as quasi-public space, you can also start to recognize similar quasi-public spaces in the city, outside the mall. Right across the street from my house in Hollywood at the time, there were people putting rugs on chain link fences and selling them to drivers passing by. This was a very different kind of commerce. It demonstrated very clearly that public space had not ended at all. The problem was too narrow definitions of both public and space.

In the meantime, I also started to read French philosophers and theorists, like Henri Lefebvre, with his formulation of ‘the right to the city’. He believed that ‘everyday life’ was a crucial lens for understanding society. My reading of his work was extremely selective, emphasizing only the positive part and ignoring the rest. But what I saw out there in the city of Los Angeles was an amazing array of everyday practices. Immigrants would take over an empty parking lot after people went home at night, set out tables with checkered tablecloths to serve food like it was their home. I saw how these practices were also political struggles. For example, the day laborers, who stand on the street outside *Home Depot* and *Brico* stores. These laborers, mostly Mexican and Central American immigrants, wait

“THERE ARE MANY GRADATIONS OF PUBLICNESS AND PRIVATENESS. IF YOU ACCEPT THIS SPECTRUM, YOU START TO SEE HOW THE MALL PROVIDES A QUASI-PUBLIC SPACE.”

there to be picked up for work. *Home Depot* tried to get rid of them, but due to an enormous organizing effort, the jornaleros acquired the right to be there. They carried signs stating ‘The right to work is a human right.’ The stores even had to provide bathrooms and other services for them. For me, this was extremely positive: it showed me that human agency is still possible, and that there are many different politics of public space.

At the same time, although there were street vendors everywhere, street vending was still illegal. For the vendors, this meant a constant threat that the police could easily shut them down and take their goods. Only two years ago, due to an enormous political effort and organization, which took 30 years, they finally acquired the right to street vending in Los Angeles!

HT: How do you understand this political struggle over the right to street vending with regard to the issue of public space?

MC: This, for me, is a clear example of what you can call ‘the right to public space’. This right must include, for me, the right to use public space as an economic space. This goes from the panhandler, who is conducting an economic transaction, to the day laborers standing on the street and selling their labor to vendors. I therefore would describe public space not as a static entity. It is a continuous struggle between different publics and



BLACK LIVES MATTER PLAZA, WASHINGTON DC (2020)

groups, different practices and occupations. This is not something to erase, but rather something to embrace.

Lately, I have been doing research in China on public space as well. In this totally different context, I recognize the same struggles as in the U.S. I focused on the unique condition of villages in the Pearl River Delta. These villages are very interesting because they are a bounded urban

type regulated by the government. This condition originates from land rights that Mao gave rural villages. As a result, the inhabitants of these villages are the only people in China who can elect their own village leaders and who can build their own houses. They are the only people who can create and control their physical space, although within certain limits. These residents thus have a surprising amount of agency.

As you can imagine, this situation results in a contested condition. In these villages, you see a continuous struggle between the government and the people. The government is trying to control the villages and their residents, and impose very stringent regulations on public space. But the people are endlessly inventive in trying to get around those regulations. The kind of interaction between control and evasion of control is fascinating.

HT: What are the important struggles over public space today in the United States?

MC: Most important is the struggle to be different in public. A concentrated group of African Americans or Latinos in public space is perceived as a threat, while a gathering of white people is celebrated. Take for instance the case of a park in Oakland around Lake Merritt. It has become very controversial because numbers of African Americans assembled there to barbecue. In a notorious case, a white woman called in to complain that black people were barbecuing. It became a very heated environment, as more and more African Americans purposefully came there to claim the space. The situation went on for several months until the city shut it down. Such struggles are going on everywhere, all the time.

But this particular struggle has changed in an even more dramatic way in the past decade. Some groups in our society are denied the right to be in public space, as the killing of Trayvon Martin, George Floyd and many other Black people demonstrates. To be in the street as an African American means

“ THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACE MUST INCLUDE THE RIGHT TO USE PUBLIC SPACE AS AN ECONOMIC SPACE.”

risking your life. That is the largest challenge to public space in the United States. It is literally a life-or-death issue. African American men, but also women, have not achieved the right to public space, even though the state guarantees it legally. Therefore, I consider the Black Lives Matter movement, to be the most important public space developments in the last 10 years.

HT: How do these struggles over public space and societal injustices relate to other pressing urban developments, the change of cities through suburbanization, gentrification and segregation?

MC: Many of these struggles and killings take place in suburban environments or on the highway. Trayvon Martin was killed in Stanford, Florida, in a suburban gated community. Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, also a suburb. Many central cities have been emptied out of African Americans and Latinos, from places that we might call ghettos, to better housing conditions in suburban locations. Simultaneously, central cities have become largely places for wealthier white people. The central city is no longer the central site of struggle over public space. It has become a more exclusive, controlled, and surveilled space. Instead, struggles over public space can happen anywhere, in any part of the city or outside it.



LAFAYETTE SQUARE PARK, OAKLAND CA, WALTER HOOD, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT (1999)

HT: Architecture is often understood as an instrument to mediate between different, conflicting and opposing interests. But if public space is, essentially, a space characterized by struggle, mediating seems not to be

the proper intervention. How do you understand the agency of architecture with respect to public space?

MC: That is an interesting question. One of the goals of *Everyday Urbanism* was to point out the physical qualities of public space, and ways of understanding time and space that could actually be useful for designers. My two co-editors, John Cage and John Kaliski, were both professional urban designers, and they really wanted to link our findings to practice. We formulated what was later borrowed by “tactical urbanism”—the idea that time is as important as space. Things can happen in one place at a certain time. But this does not mean that it recurs. My own contribution to the book focused on the physical and experiential qualities of domesticity found in many everyday spaces in Los Angeles. The qualities of ordinary materials, their softness, ornamentation, and human scale can all contribute to a sense of domesticity in public. This often happens as vendors offer food in homelike settings. In such moments the quality of materials and creative practices support one another, all ideas that designers can use to design public spaces. This is obviously a completely different approach than the designs and theories of someone like Jan Gehl, who, to me, represents what I would call ‘feel good white person urbanism.’

HT: What do you mean by ‘white person urbanism’?

MC: Gehl designs the same Copenhagen public spaces all over the world, with the same bicycle paths, sidewalk cafes, and pedestrianized streets. He never takes on the issues that are really at stake, such as rights, exclusion or street livelihoods. Instead, his designs deal with highly conventional notions of public space as simply pleasurable, satisfying a universal public. Along with organizations such as the *Project for Public Space*, who are also allegedly devoted to public space, he neglects the most serious issues of public space. They approach public

“AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN, BUT ALSO WOMEN, HAVE NOT ACHIEVED THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACE, EVEN THOUGH THE STATE GUARANTEES IT LEGALLY.”

space from a highly generic professional perspective. Another professional approach might be architects working for a municipality. These designers face other difficulties, with competing demands from different groups of citizens. However, since the municipal architects are very familiar with the places and the publics where they work, they can potentially create new



LAFAYETTE SQUARE PARK, OAKLAND CA, WALTER HOOD, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT (1999)

and distinctive public spaces in diverse circumstances. This depends on the designer avoiding already codified ideas and principles, and understanding the users and their concerns.

My colleague at Berkeley, Walter Hood, who is a landscape architect, only starts designing parks after carefully observing the neighborhood, aiming to understand what is going on. For an assignment redesigning a park in Oakland, he observed that the existing park was used by older men, who stayed during the day and drank together. He decided not to edit that out in his park design. Architects, I would argue, necessarily need a similar attentiveness to existing use, to the publics that are already there. But at the same time, you also have to understand that these uses and publics change over time. Time is a very important dimension of space. Designers also need to pay attention to circumstances. Their designs need to be conditional and circumstantial, and to leave room for occupation and improvisation. Most parks in the United States usually have an incredible list of the things you can't do there, and drinking is usually at the top of it. Such lists question the very publicness of these spaces. Is this space really public? No! But ultimate publicness does not exist. There are always different kinds of exclusions and restrictions. Paradoxically, some private

spaces are more public than are formal public (in the sense of being owned by the state) spaces. But is this what we mean when we discuss public space? Should it be ‘state-owned’? Or does ‘public’ mean: accommodating groups of publics? I would argue that to pin the idea of public space down to particular circumstances is a slippery idea. A fixed definition would deny the various struggles over public space, the changing publics, and the assertion of different kinds of rights over the space. All these instances are related to the specificity of the location of a park or square, and what publics make use of it. Who owns the space, who can appropriate it, and who has a say? These are the questions to be understood and addressed.

However, coming back to your question on what architecture can do, it is hard for designers to mediate between the claims of different publics. I would argue that they should not aim to please everybody. For me, that means acknowledging the issue of struggle. Public space is an incredibly complicated issue, since it is constantly changing and contested. My goal in teaching has been to sensitize architects to these challenges, to observe, to understand who is using these spaces, and what they are doing. Public spaces are meant for particular publics. Nevertheless, we cannot choreograph how and if this public adopts the space. That is up to the public itself. But one of the problems we have in the United States is that architecture is largely a very un-diverse profession. Walter Hood and many other designers are starting to rethink what public space design can be. Their projects, in the era of Black Lives Matter, are reshaping the design profession’s approach to designed public space. So public space has not ended at all! It is always renewing itself, and will continue to do so in the future.

ENDNOTES

1. Margaret Crawford, ‘The World in a Shopping Mall’, in: Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variations on a*

- Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).
2. Michael Sorkin, 'Introduction', in: Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), XV.
 3. Margaret Crawford, 'Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles over Public Space in Los Angeles', in: *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Sep., 1995), 4.
 4. John Chase, Margeret Crawford, John Kaliski (eds.), *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999).
 5. A clear instance of the political dimension was shown in the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles, which happened shortly after the publication of *Variations of a Theme Park* in 1992. Margaret Crawford, 'Blurring the Boundaries. Public Space and Private Life', in: John Chase, Margeret Crawford, John Kaliski (eds.), *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), 28.
 6. See for instance Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in: Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

ARCHITECTURAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE RIGHT TO A CITY

SAUL FISHER

INTRODUCTION. WHY A RIGHT TO THE CITY?

Before there were cities, it is hardly likely that anyone ever expressed the thought that they have a right to one; and in the roughly six-thousand-year history of urban environments, no such idea of a right to the city was formulated until the French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre proposed just this, in 1968. And when Lefebvre did so, this was in energetic but rather vague fashion, as much a rallying cry for the disaffected and marginalized as the expression of a clear-cut moral or legal concept on which to base detailed social design or change. Vague or not, Lefebvre's proposal found great favor among urban planners, international civil servants, public advocates, and others—somewhat independent of political or economic bent. What is the attraction—why do some believe that there is a right to the city?

In what follows, I sketch a version of the right to the city (RTTC) that I take to be (a) feasible, (b) generic, and so (c) broadly amenable to many of its adherents; further, I suggest how it is that this entails special sorts of responsibilities or obligations for architects and others tending to our built environment and the spaces—especially public space—so structured and defined. Along the way, I provide a brief account of some historical motivations for embracing the right to the city, as well as reasons for endorsing my generic account. For the moment, I offer the quick suggestion that typical reasons for supporting a right to the city are grounded in traditional rights considerations: for one, benefits of urban life point to a positive

right, along the lines of an entitlement; and for another, dangers and impediments to life—and quality of life—in the city point to a negative right, along the lines of freedoms from harm and liberties to voluntary engagements. How all this has a particularly urban focus and character, and how such a right or rights translate into specifically architectural responsibilities, depends at least in part on the sorts of things cities are and how they are constituted, or so I will argue. I begin, though, with a set of ground rules for any putative right to the city, basic principles as such one should uphold and not violate.

1. RIGHT TO THE CITY: INITIAL PARAMETERS, HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, AND A PROPOSAL

a. Assumptions.

I start with a small set of parametric assumptions about what a right to the city should look like, which thereby provide ground rules for crafting such a right. I take these assumptions as more or less self-evident or, at least, as relatively obvious candidate parameters.

THE GOOD OR THE BEST CITY. First, the right to the city is a right to a particular range of possible cities with desirable or requisite characteristics. A right to a city which guaranteed no more than an urban hellscape would be useless, cynical ‘right.’ Note that this suggests that RTTC is, broadly speaking, an entitlement or claims right, where the positive good is a city that, for those with the rights to it—presumably its citizens—is in the balance a place more good than bad to live and work in. A further variation in this direction is to posit a RTTC that guarantees the best possible version of whatever city to which the right pertains.¹

COMMUNAL. Second, RTTC is a community-focused, publicly oriented right, which individuals hold but as pertains to their current or prospective group membership qua urban citizens.² It’s unclear that hermits, survivalists, rural dwellers, and exurbanites have RTTC; and the case of suburbanites is marginal, an intriguing case given their symbiotic relationship with the city.³ In short, RTTC is a right attaching to people who live in cities, hence live together in densely-populated communities. Given a communal orientation, RTTC should likely reflect historical, heritage, cultural and emotional motivations and stakes of the groups in question, with corresponding entitlements. As I argue, however, positing group claims rights does not entail all and only group obligations; further, the optimal way to meet such claims may not be in the aggregate, that is, not by the city as a whole entity but through the actions and choices of its parts and constituent members.⁴

FUTURE-FACING. Third, RTTC is forward-looking. Any rights such as we claim are not necessarily—and not limited to—the city as it exists now, but as it will exist in the future. This is partly a function of the imperfections of cities and a RTTC claim on the best possible city. But it's also a reflection of the city's dynamic character—its shifting and growing over time, and becoming more and less accessible, more and less capable of housing or otherwise serving its citizens, more and less well arranged to promote the good life.

Taken together, these parameters tell us that a RTTC should provide those with greatest investment in the city—the citizens—with guarantees to ongoing improvements and enhancements of goods and engagements, as well as amelioration or elimination of harms, such that quality of life progresses rather than stagnates or declines, so that an urban life is a worthy and rewarding one.

b. The Lefebvre Construal and Alternate Takes

Looking at actual, historical articulations of a RTTC—from Lefebvre onward—we see some degree of conformity with these parameters, at least in spirit, and if only in one or another fractional form. Lefebvre, for his part, while initially giving us RTTC, may not be its best proponent. First, as Loren King and others have noted, his Marxism makes for poor rights advocacy.⁵ The classic Marxist sees rights as a frivolity of bourgeois democratic politics, detached from realities of material goods distributed and controlled by the capital class. Second, and more compellingly for the non-Marxist, he does not say that in which a RTTC consists nor, as Attoh notes, how it would work out in practice.⁶ It's not surprising that, on a Marxist reading, we aren't told about particular entitlements or liberties. At all events, we are left with the question of what, quite, this is a right to. Nor are we told who has these rights, though it is fair to assume that, for Lefebvre,

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this is primarily interesting as a right insofar as it represents an unfulfilled commitment to the dispossessed and the working class. One thing Lefebvre does tell us, on the other hand, is that those who have RTTC have it because they are participants in construction of the city as an urban project of living and working together.⁷ This is a crucial observation for just about any version of an RTTC as it highlights the reasons that cities came into being and continue to grow as the dominant form of human settlement: cities exist for the advancement of material and cultural wellbeing. His point is that intentionally and intensely concentrating populations in the same places—namely, cities—introduces claims on how people should live and prosper in those contexts.



EMILE AILLAUD, LA GRANDE BORNE, GRIGNY (1971)

Of course, not all is well in the city. Another thing Lefebvre tells us—following his Marxist-style analysis—is that while citizens build the city and gain the benefits of living in the urban environment, they are also exploited by the capital class in so doing and are alienated from the city though it is their own project.⁸ Accordingly, RTTC for Lefebvre consists in a right for urban citizens to direct life in the city as engaged with, and unalienated from, their urban environment.⁹ With these few and imprecise notions, there is much room for interpretation and variation. For example, we might direct or shape life in a city so as to not be alienating through direct behavioral interventions like rules, laws, intentional cultural shifts, and the like—but alternatively we might think it more effective to deploy environmental interventions as crafted in architectural and planning design.

Two broad traditions have taken up the Lefebvrian RTTC, also focusing on the city as the increasingly principal context of human settlement and the greatest source of wealth, creativity, power, as well as other human

phenomena, productions, and endeavors.¹⁰ For one, Marxists have tended to extrapolate from or build on Lefebvre's view within their set of conventions, for example, by explaining the role of surplus value in urban productivity and positing the RTTC as a right to that value and its management.¹¹ For another, a range of urban planners, geographers, political activists, and others have articulated more specific rights as they take to realize a vision of eliminating, punishing and disenfranchising injustices, such as Lefebvre associated with alienation and exploitation in the city or by its capital class. Examples of such specific rights include rights to housing, transportation, communications, participatory decision-making, participatory urban design, and protection from harms (e.g., excessive state force). While stimulated by Lefebvre's critique, however, these latter views generally assume neither diagnoses nor solutions along Marxist lines. As with the Lefebvrian proposal, the latter, non-Marxist views stay within the lines of the parametric assumptions laid out here, motivated by a goal-state, sensitive to the dynamism of the city, and communally oriented. Yet they also move beyond Lefebvre, in concretely specifying goods, services, liberties, or freedoms to which citizens have a right qua citizens.

c. A Generic Proposal.

A third approach is to craft a generic RTTC that, while also inspired by Lefebvre, is not wedded to his framework, to Marxist tenets, or to any of the specific entitlement or liberty-oriented rights in particular as may also be inspired by that framework. To this end, consider a traditional view of rights (following, e.g., Hohfeld)¹² as comprises the positive and the negative, emphasizing claims on entitlements on one hand and ensuring maintenance of liberty and protection from harm on the other. A more recent addition to this array in the rights literature has it that, in addition to attending to concerns of or for individuals, a complete range of rights reflects

“ THE RIGHT TO THE CITY FOR LEFEBVRE CONSISTS IN A RIGHT FOR URBAN CITIZENS TO DIRECT LIFE IN THE CITY AS ENGAGED WITH, AND UNALIENATED FROM, THEIR URBAN ENVIRONMENT.”

concerns of or for communities as aggregate parties. Along these lines, and in pursuit of a maximalist right to the city, we would likely want that right to comprise constituent sub-rights as advance claims, meet communitarian concerns, and guarantee liberties.¹³

I propose that this basic taxonomy points to an umbrella conception of a right to the city that includes at least these basic sub-rights: *urban access*, as entitlement claim; *urban inclusion*, as community right; and *urban flourishing*, as a liberties-assuring and freedom-from-harms right. A full-blown defense of these sub-rights is beyond the present scope; here I note a few definitional points and take note of one common denominator relative to urban public space. First, *access* is particularly suitable as a fundamental entitlement or claims right in the urban context because the city's density and intensity is not only a positive economically and culturally but a negative as well, building and accelerating scarcity of resources—be they necessary or merely desirable. Insofar as scarcity is managed by reference to moral or justice considerations, we want a right to access the city's resources as a guarantee of moral or just distribution, for example, to protect those least likely to secure access otherwise. Second, *inclusion* is suitable as a community right in the urban context because the purpose of cities, at root, is to bring people together for commerce and culture—



POLICE RAID IN GRIGNY, QUARTIER DE LA GRANDE BORNE (2016).

such that marginalizing and excluding people is antithetical to the core urban goals. Hence we want a right that serves to guarantee that, even if living in distinctive communities for solidarity purposes,¹⁴ all citizens are included in the broader urban community to the extent that they choose or as is otherwise socially optimal. Much more may be said about what inclusion entails here. Suffice it to mention, in this context, various

forms of openness, availability, and welcoming as comprise but are not limited to: involvement in decision-making of import to the urban whole or significant parts thereof; participation in and consumption of the urban host culture and other constituent cultures; access to economic and social opportunities of the city; and engagement with infrastructure and networks of the city. And as a third sub-right, *flourishing* is suitable as a liberties-assuring and freedom-from-harms right in the urban context because the city only flourishes—e.g., economically, socially, culturally—when its citizens can flourish. This in turn requires a negative right or rights of individuals and communities to enjoy protection from harms and liberties to act in ways that promote thriving and success, as well as a positive right to such entitlements as are accorded to city dwellers and promote citizen success and thriving.¹⁵

It merits noting that, as a common denominator, all these sub-rights point to, and may be exploited to sustain, the broad claim of the urban dweller on public space. For example, city dwellers have a right to access public space, as a scarce commodity more typically contracted than expanded by urban development; city dwellers may only realize a right to urban inclusion if there is sufficient and fitting public space in which to freely commune; and the city and its dwellers can only truly *flourish*—optimize their thriving and success—where citizens may pursue work, study, and leisure beyond their own private spaces—free from the limits of solitude and constraints on personal room to move and share, e.g., ideas, innovation, or culture. This picture is consonant with at least one prominent RTTC view that takes city-wise rights to primarily consist in rights to public space.¹⁶

To be sure, this is a very general account of only three possible sub-rights of a RTTC. Others might be articulated; these have the merit of accounting for a broad range of urban life. To see this, as well as how

these rights may be engaged, it's helpful to consider cases where they are not, that is, where the rights are not recognized or else are recognized but infringed. Thus, we have:

DEVELOPER. Rita, a major developer in a major city, is planning a giant housing and commercial development of a large area of the city heretofore left in a state of disrepair and disuse. Elected officials have given carte blanche to Rita to develop the site however they see fit. The public has been left out of any semblance of a decision-making process. Operative RTTC sub-rights here concern inclusion and community.

STREET GANG. A new, violent STREET GANG menaces a previously prosperous area, and the residents are afraid to leave their houses. Police and social workers are ineffective and, while the gang grows in popularity and financial success, the neighborhood loses its vibrant street life and spirals downward as a desirable place to live. The operative RTTC sub-right here, as highlighted by their violation or neglect, pertains to flourishing. Note, however, that in STREET GANG, the scenario need not have been located in a city; the setting could have been suburban or even rural. We can fix this in the following scenario:

PUBLIC HOUSING GANG. As in STREET GANG, public security in the area deteriorates. Unlike the generic location in STREET GANG, though, this scenario is specifically set in urban public housing, where the density of population heightens the probability of criminality, and the deteriorating security environment induces social, economic, and psychological depression. Operative RTTC sub-rights here are related to flourishing, specifically in urban contexts.

MÉTRO. Jean-Marie waits at a métro station for a train that never arrives. Unbeknownst to him, the city has discontinued that train line and is preparing to demolish the station shortly. Henceforth Jean-Marie will need to walk to work, 7 km away. The operative RTTC sub-right here concerns entitlement, specifically to affordable and convenient mass transit service in a modern city.

These cases give a small taste of the diversity of scenarios where quality of life, integration and inclusion, and just benefits of city life—all as particular to urban contexts—are degraded for some parties X because of the actions or inactions of other parties Y. (In addition to these negative scenarios, other sorts of scenarios will highlight a *positive* picture, wherein RTTC-type rights are realized or sustained; see Appendix A.) Two points merit our attention in all these cases. For one, such cases arise in specifically urban contexts, and because of the nature of people living and working

together—which, as we have noted, is largely due to density and intensity of populations and their interactions. For another, the dereliction of Y as the cause of the failure to realize or sustain X’s rights points to Y’s responsibilities or obligations to X and all other citizens relative to the corresponding RTTC sub-rights as having not been realized or sustained in such cases. In brief, as the dereliction of Y prevents the relevant sub-rights of X from being satisfied, we sense that Y is to blame, that is, to be held responsible.

Before moving on, let’s revisit the proposed parameters for a viable RTTC, namely, that such a right should promote the best possible city, should be communal in orientation, and should be future-facing given the organic and not-so-organic change in the life of a city. All three sub-rights proposed here—to access, inclusion, and flourishing—are contributing and perhaps necessary factors for optimizing the city and city life. Further, access and inclusion are manifestly community- and communally-oriented. It may be harder to specify that or how these particular sub-rights are constitutive of a future-facing RTTC, though it is also hard to imagine articulating or satisfying any future-facing RTTC that fails to build upon, or at least recognize, prior commitments to access, inclusion, and flourishing of urban dwellers.

2. IDENTIFYING AND ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITIES OR OBLIGATIONS

So far, we have the picture of a broad RTTC as an umbrella right, comprising at least three sub-rights, including a right to entitlements, community, and flourishing. What attaches these rights to the city context in particular is a function of urban conditions, most prominently a population density that entails or generates problems, needs, and desiderata, that is, the stuff of special rights. And—as is traditionally held relative to rights generally—satisfaction or advancement of such RTTC sub-rights relies on parties having relevant responsibilities

“ ARCHITECTS AND THOSE WITH SIMILAR OCCUPATIONS ARE HIGHLY VISIBLE IN THIS REGARD, AS THEY PLAN AND SHAPE THE PHYSICAL AND BROADLY EXPERIENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CITY.”

or obligations. In this domain, failure to meet those responsibilities or obligations results in citizens failing to flourish, to attain or maintain community membership, or to receive such goods or services as are expectable in a justly ordered urban life.

Two principal tasks arise relative to talk about rights-wise responsibilities or obligations: first, the *what*—identifying those responsibilities or obligations corresponding to particular rights; and second, the *who*—identifying the parties with significant responsibilities or obligations in this regard. Both tasks represent complex questions with dizzying arrays of possible answers—as many as there are variables factoring into urban planning and design and city management, financing, servicing, and so on. One specific challenge in identifying and assigning RTTC-wise responsibilities or obligations is the great diversity of urban actors (agents) pursuing different tasks relevant to the wide variety of sub-rights, in providing goods and services, promoting inclusion, or facilitating flourishing. Thus, politicians, bureaucrats, social services, corporate and small business owners, educators, health providers, public safety personnel, and many others populate a long list of people with such responsibilities.



CRICKET IN THE STREETS OF MUMBAI

Among these professions and roles, architects and those with similar occupations (urban planners, urban designers, etc.)—whom I'll refer to as 'architectural agents'—are highly visible in this regard, as they plan and shape the physical and broadly experiential characteristics of the city. Indeed, there is a special moral claim on architectural agents relative to RTTC-wise responsibilities and obligations: they draw the contours of possible ways

that citizens can organize and conduct their lives and work in the city, and in this way they support or prevent the possible pursuit of activities by all other agents as may contribute to the satisfaction of RTTC-wise responsibilities and obligations. This sort of meta-responsibility is additional to their ground-level RTTC-wise responsibilities in the urban context.

In this set of meta-responsibilities, however, architectural agents are not alone. One other family of actors with similar meta-responsibilities is the financial services industry, without whom nothing is possible in city life, including realization of architectural plans. So architects' responsibilities may be outweighed by those of others with greater power to determine the fate of cities and popular rights to them. Even if not outpaced in such fashion, architects are clearly not the sole actors responsible for realization of RTTC-wise sub-rights, whether at the ground-level or the meta-level.

A further difficulty in assigning RTTC-wise responsibilities to architectural agents concerns the temporal. The city and its population shift over time, and with demographic, social, economic, and other shifts come changes in the identity and nature of those holding the right to the city, and the array of sub-rights to which they may justly lay claim. Thus it is unclear to whom architects of a given moment might have responsibilities—particularly in accounting for future population shifts—or how the duration of such responsibilities should be gauged.

A third challenge in this regard concerns the appropriate degrees of RTTC-wise responsibility to be shouldered by architectural agents. For example, it cannot be fair to assign such responsibilities to individual architectural agents, however influential, relative to the entirety of a city, even if—as with Oscar Niemeyer and Brasilia—they have designed the city's basic plans and major structures. Nor is it fair, conversely, to assign such responsibilities

to the architectural professions in collective fashion, for we then excuse each architect from standard individual obligations. Neither individual architects nor architects in the aggregate considered as the profession overall can assume or be assigned the full range of such RTTC-wise responsibilities as we would apportion to architectural agents.

3. A COMPOSITIONALIST APPROACH TO CITY-WISE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

How, then, to apportion RTTC-wise responsibilities or obligations to architectural agents—by what means and to what degree? My proposal reflects a key aspect of the aforementioned scenarios (DEVELOPER, PUBLIC HOUSING GANG, and MÉTRO): while some such instances where rights are upheld or denied have a system-wide or city-wide origin or developmental path or set of consequences, many—perhaps most—such instances arise out of highly localized circumstances. In short, RTTC-related scenarios arise as much relative to a bus stop or a single office tower as they do relative to the urban water system or the city's entire zoning code. It is those highly localized scenarios where architects and others with architectural agency have the most frequent and robust obligations relative to RTTC and its family of sub-rights.

To make this suggestion work, such that architects and other architectural agents can assume—at the micro-scale—the sorts of obligations we take to follow from RTTC, we need to build on two more fundamental claims. First, we need to show that architectural agents have a kind of efficacy to begin with that allows them to meaningfully contribute to realization or sustaining of RTTC sub-rights. Second, we need to show that what architectural agents do as individuals or in small groups at the micro-scale rolls up to the realization or sustaining of RTTC sub-rights.

The first fundamental claim is, at root, an empirical point. In the early interactions between architects and environmental psychologists (1970s), there were worries about the feasibility of 'architectural determinism,' the view that architectural forms and the spaces they shape can have regular and predictable effects on behaviors of those experiencing the forms and spaces. While there is cause for caution as elsewhere in the behavioral sciences, a wealth of scientific and commercial data supports the general notion that our range of choices and actions *may* be influenced environmentally—and that even subtle design interventions in the built environment *may* shift behaviors.¹⁷ Insofar as realization or sustaining of RTTC sub-rights entails enabling, encouraging, or preventing citizens from undertaking particular behaviors, the empirical accounts of 'architectural determinism' tell us *how* architectural agents take on such responsibility.

The second fundamental claim involves more of a conceptual move,

drawing on (1) a picture of RTTC in which our judgment that either the umbrella right or sub-rights are satisfied is divisible by spatial and temporal regions, together with (2) a compositional notion of architectural objects. First, we know that we can divide judgment about rights satisfaction by regions (spatial or temporal) given that rights are mostly, if not always, realized only partially and to varying degrees depending on location and timeframe. While this is typically seen as a real-world imperfection for any rights regime, this feature also allows us to think about satisfaction of rights in such limited domains—of a given place or a given time—as successes within those domains. And since, in the case of realizing or satisfying RTTC-wise sub-rights, we cannot expect architectural agents (whether as individuals or in the aggregate) to satisfy such rights—either across the whole of a city or for the entire duration of its existence—spatially and temporally modest targets are called for.

Second, in a compositional account of architectural objects, we have a ready instrument for taking apart the city along spatial or temporal lines—such that we can reasonably apportion RTTC-wise responsibilities to architectural agents at a level (spatially) and over a duration for which expectations and accountability are realistic goals. A compositional account of architectural objects, as relative to cities in particular, says that urban built environments are composed of built structures as unitary individuals or collections thereof, such that, as aggregates of those unitary or collective individuals, cities are shaped by those individuals. The idea is that cities, as wholes, are shaped by the parts they comprise.¹⁸ This is a three-dimensional, spatial picture, but it is trivial to expand this compositionality to a fourth, temporal dimension: the character of cities is shaped over time by earlier instantiations of the urban built environment, both where the earlier elements of that environment survive, as well as where they cease to exist and

“PUTTING THESE TWO ELEMENTS TOGETHER, WE CAN REASONABLY APPORTION RESPONSIBILITY TO ARCHITECTURAL AGENTS FOR RTTC-WISE SUB-RIGHTS.”

make way for new elements. Compositionism contributes to our ability to judge the satisfaction of RTTC-wise sub-rights by giving us a means of gauging whether built structures (or collections thereof) may help to raise or lower satisfaction of city-wise rights within bounds—that is, on a partial or fractional basis. The idea is to then ‘roll up’ (sum across) that degree of rights-satisfaction, by taking those structures as parts contributing to the city or its regions one piece at a time, creating conditions for, e.g., strengthening inclusion, providing just benefits attached to city life, and promoting flourishing.

Putting these two elements together, we can reasonably apportion responsibility to architectural agents for RTTC-wise sub-rights. The first element is recognizing that architectural agents can shape behaviors in ways that contribute to or detract from realization of rights special to the urban context, e.g., to housing or mass transit or access to cultural resources. The second element associates satisfaction of such given sub-rights with particular buildings or collections of buildings, or sets of buildings at a particular time. In this way, we can tie realization of rights, and corresponding responsibilities to that end, to particular architectural agents where they are actually in a position to assume such levels of responsibility. Further, compositionism allows us to assemble an aggregated reading of architectural agents’ successes, on a city-wide basis, in furthering the RTTC of a given city’s citizens—as spread across different sub-rights as well as the component parts of the city.

4. PROBLEMS

Here are at least three prospective problems with this view. First, architects generally accept a range of responsibilities, of course, though not in an absolute sense that some advocates associate with at least some rights in the moral and political philosophical tradition.¹⁹ Consider, in this vein, city-wide and system-wide scenarios as invoke RTTC sub-rights and recognizably feature city-wide and system-wide agents with corresponding obligations we might take to be absolute per their rights-wise stipulation. For example, a RTTC sub-right to access to healthcare in the urban context (relative to, say, asthma prevention and mitigation in distressed neighborhoods) may well be recognizable as an absolute right—one not defeated by other considerations. On the other hand, for scenarios that invoke RTTC sub-rights on the local or building level, the responsible architectural agents are unlikely to have corresponding obligations in any traditionally absolute sense. Given that utility is a core professional and heritage-wise goal for architects, obligations are *pro tanto* in their worldview—they go only as far as they go, and can be defeated

for the greater good. So, there is at least a cultural gap here, if we think that architectural agents have infeasible obligations relative to RTTC sub-rights.

Second, I have suggested here that compositionality gives us a means of summing across judgments of architectural agents as satisfying (or not) RTTC sub-rights in given spatial or temporal regions, rather than tying satisfaction of rights to the city-wide scale alone and then unrealistically pinning responsibilities for such on architectural agents (singly or all together). But we might not think that we can speak meaningfully of rights-satisfaction as the sort of thing one can sum across, even if we can differentially gauge levels of rights satisfaction across distinctive spaces and times. How we see this summation problem will turn, I suspect, on whether we think of rights regimes as meaningfully satisfied at all if they are fractionally satisfied only in this or that neighborhood, only by this or that built structure. We can only sum across rights satisfaction for the city as a whole in this way if we rule out the notion that rights only satisfied for some populations are not satisfied universally hence not satisfied at all.

Finally, it may be that I have insufficiently demarcated responsibilities attaching to architects in particular—as against those attaching to other ‘architectural agents’ such as urban designers or planners. These are, after all, different roles. One way to carve up the attendant responsibilities, for example, might reflect the scale of the corresponding design tasks.²⁰ That said, the borders of architectural and urban design and planning disciplines are famously porous, especially in the domain of localized urban projects such as London’s Barbican Centre, New York’s Lincoln Center, or Paris’s La Villette. So, practice may point to a need for vagueness here. A more pertinent response is principled: the compositionalist framework I have drawn upon should do the work of apportioning responsibilities for satisfying RTTC to different sorts

of architectural agents in accordance with (a) the urban design element as distinguished possibly by scale but equally possibly by function, systemic role, liability, or still other factors; and (b) the attendant RTTC sub-rights as come into play with each such design element. Even similar ‘puzzle pieces’ as compose a city will likely prompt different responsibility assignments to different roles across, for example, urban cultures and contexts.²¹

5. CONCLUSION

I close with a brief revisit of the STREET GANG and PUBLIC HOUSING GANG scenarios, which taken together, I propose, highlight the character of architectural agent’s RTTC-wise responsibilities in the specifically urban context. Recall that the difference between those two scenarios is that the first could take place in all manner of locations, whereas the second is at least in part the product of a city setting, which from an environmental psychology perspective has gone very much awry. At issue is (a) the degree to which a built environment that resembles an urban rat trap for human beings may accelerate, worsen, and perpetuate criminal activity or other socially deviant behaviors by some of the local citizenry, and (b) the degree to which architects and planners of said environment have responsibilities for designing in ways so as to lessen the probabilities of such behaviors and their consequences. If citizens of all backgrounds and housing settings have rights to flourishing in the city, as entails a further right to public safety, then we have identified some level of responsibility for realizing such rights as may be apportioned to architectural agents. This is, to be sure, only a piece of the puzzle: others will have relevant responsibilities and these are just some few RTTC-wise sub-rights among many others. But if we start at this level of analysis, we will be en route to identifying the many puzzle pieces of responsibility attached to the actions and choices of architects relative to the fullest range of RTTC-wise sub-rights. That will give us a picture of ways that, at the micro-scale, architects and those in related professions contribute to realizing or thwarting realization of rights to the city.

APPENDIX A. SCENARIOS OF RIGHTS SECURED AND SUSTAINED.

CULTURAL FESTIVAL. A marginalized immigrant community sustains its cultural traditions in private homes and makeshift community spaces. The city invites community members to participate in the summer cultural festival in the park. Regular cultural programming by the immigrant community, open to all, ensues and the community’s cultural threads are further woven into the greater urban fabric. The operative RTTC sub-right here concerns inclusion.

SMALL-SCALE RETAIL. The city's produce and dry goods street market is thriving thanks to a zoning law that keeps rents low on the market stalls and protects the market's contributions to affordable and animated city life that is at once dense and human-scale. The operative RTTC sub-right here concerns flourishing.

GARBAGE. The city's sanitation department fails to collect the garbage for two years due to inadequate landfill capacity. Quality of life declines rapidly as the garbage mounts, hindering transportation and circulation of goods and services. After mass demonstrations and public pressures, a new landfill location is identified for safe disposal, and garbage collection and processing are resumed. The operative RTTC sub-right here concerns entitlement.

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ENDNOTES

1. While the best possible city *could* be at least more good than bad, the optimized good city and the best possible city are not necessarily equivalent. Beyond the present scope: which is *more* desirable may be a contextual matter, or decidable by logical or material considerations.
2. David Harvey argues, from one Marxist perspective, that RTTC is a collective right and not an individual right; cf. David Harvey, 'The Right to the City, *New Left Review* 53 (2008), 23-40.
3. Mark Purcell sees citizens' claim on RTTC as grounded in their contribution to urban experience and urban space; if so, the suburban claim is strengthened; cf. Mark Purcell, 'Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,' *GeoJournal* 58 (2002): 99-108.
4. Margaret Cuonzo sees RTTC in holistic, ecological terms—inclusive of the city and all its citizens at once; cf. Margaret Cuonzo, 'The Right to the City and the Rights of the City.' In Deborah Mutnick, Margaret Cuonzo, Carole Griffiths,

- Timothy Leslie, Jay M. Shuttleworth (eds.), *The City is an Ecosystem: Sustainable Education, Policy, and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2022), 105-115.
5. Loren King, 'Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City.' In Sharon M. Meagher, Samantha Noll, and Joseph S. Biehl (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the City*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 76-86.
 6. Kafui A. Attah, 'What Kind of Right is the Right to the City?,' *Progress in Human Geography* 35 (2011) 5: 669–685; cf. 674.
 7. While in Marxist orthodoxy, the city is a material artifact assembled by its inhabitants, Lefebvre takes the city as more of an artwork than a mundane instrument or tool. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968), 54-55.
 8. Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville*, 108, 120-121.
 9. *Ibid.*, 120-121; Attah, 'What Kind of Right', 674.
 10. Some RTTC advocates focus on a right to cities in particular as opposed to rights to generic places (as also include rural, suburban, unsettled places, etc.). I propose that cities' density and intensity effects—e.g., on social, economic, cultural, and communal conditions, information and communication facility, and so on—demand our rights-wise attention. Density and intensity are core characteristics of cities that (a) brought them into being—ostensibly, a net positive, as well as (b) produced many pressing problems of urban life.
 11. The *locus classicus* for subsequent Marxist defenses of a Lefebvrian RTTC, particularly in a geography tradition, is David Harvey, 'The Right to the City'; cf. also David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012). Don Mitchell focuses on public space, emphasizing RTTC as a means of contesting privatization (cf. Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (London: Guilford Press, 2003), esp. 13-41). Other authors view the Lefebvrian right in the context of European Marxism of his day. Chris Butler stresses the French autogestion tradition (Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge-Cavendish, 2012), esp. 133-159); Daniel Mullis sees a continuity with the Italian operaismo refrain: Daniel Mullis, 'Prendersi la città' ('Recht auf die Stadt. Facetten und Möglichkeiten einer Parole,' *Emanzipation*, 3 (2013) 2, 57-70). Jean-Pierre Garnier offers a Marxist dissent, rejecting a Lefebvrian addressing ills of capitalist urbanization as prone to serving as "...alibi, wishful thinking, or fiction"; cf. Jean-Pierre Garnier, 'Le droit à la ville de Henri Lefebvre à David Harvey. Entre théorisations et realization,' *L'Homme & la Société*, 1 (2014) 191: 59-70.

12. Wesley Hohfeld, *Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning*, Walter Wheeler Cook, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919); for an overview, cf. Leif Wenar, 'Rights,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005); <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights>. Attoh ('What Kind of Right') suggests how the rights literature may ground RTTC.
13. A distinctive model has it that a single right with different aspects accommodates the varied traditional goals of rights.
14. Defined by, e.g., ethnicity, sub-culture, age, etc.
15. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the positive right entailed here.
16. See Mitchell, *The Right to the City* (2003). For further notions of public space and rights thereto, see Evelyn S. Ruppert, 'Rights to Public Space: Regulatory Reconfigurations of Liberty', *Urban Geography*, 27 (2006) 3: 271-292; and elsewhere in this issue.
17. Even as some worry about a strict determinism, empirical evidence mounts for enhanced propensities to specific behavioral, cognitive, or emotional responses to architectural design; cf. Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017); and Debra Flanders Cushing and Evonne Miller, *Creating Great Places: Evidence-based Urban Design for Health and Wellbeing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).
18. Saul Fisher, 'Architecture and Philosophy of the City.' In Meagher, Noll, and Biehl, *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the City*, 131-142.
19. See, e.g., Russ Shafer-Landau, 'Specifying Absolute Rights,' *Arizona Law Review* 37 (1995): 209-24; for a rejection of absolute rights; see, e.g., Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
20. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for noting

this issue and suggesting a scale-based articulation of responsibilities.

21. Assigning such responsibilities to architects prompts yet other concerns. Architects are almost never solely responsible for satisfying moral claims as attach to even fractional RTTC. Their responsibilities may be outweighed by those with greater power to determine the fate of cities—or broad, popular rights to them. Further, the temporally and demographically diffuse nature of rights holders—the shifting city populace over time—make unclear to whom architects might have responsibilities, or how the duration of such responsibilities should be gauged.

PROPERTY, NECESSITY AND HOUSING. RECONSIDERING THE SITUATED RIGHT TO A PLACE TO BE

ERIKA BRANDL

Vittorio De Sica's *Il Tetto* (1956), an artful cinematographic exercise in neo-realist style, centers on one couple's quest to find a home in post-war Rome. The second half of the film sees penniless Luisa and Natale plan the completion of a house of sorts. The city regulations allow people to secure their right to a parcel of land and a small building if they manage to construct the latter without being stopped by the authorities. The completion of the house is to be secretive and realized overnight—the title of the movie refers to one of the features required for the building to be legally considered as completed, and thus occupiable: four walls, a door, and a *tetto*, a roof. At dawn, policemen find the newly erected shack, Luisa and Natale anxiously hiding within. The agents inspect it, walking around its perimeter. They palpate its block walls in a methodic way. They knock vigorously on the door, which they then try to open, without success—it is sturdily hinged and fastened. I won't spoil the film's ending, suffice it to highlight a simple intuition here at play: in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of the audience, these four walls, door, and roof are the necessary features of a house. We recognize the space of the house bounded within these closed, basic elements. We recognize it as the space of the private, where inhabitants' bodies are "sheltered" and safe. This characterization is time and again set in opposition (or patent complementarity) with the space of the public. Built public spaces evoke imaginaries of collectivity and seamlessness; of civicism and openness. Built private spaces evoke imaginaries of control and identifiable boundaries, of refuge, individuality and sustenance.¹

I have detailed *Il Tetto's* dwelling as fastened, closed and in many ways, impenetrable. One ought not to penetrate this little portion of city space, as it is now walled off and occupied. Regardless of nearby activities, events, gatherings, infrastructures—that which lies behind these walls is not to be touched.



VITTORIO DE SICA, *IL TETTO* (1956)

This filmic set-up hints at an established legal and sociocultural principle. There exists an architectural inside and outside. Both inside and outside spaces operate according to a given set of rules. Luisa and Natale's shack represents the paradigmatic inside space of the home. As such, we attribute to it the sacredness of private property. "That which lies behind these walls is not to be touched"—in most cultures, the claim is gospel.² The walls' outside can be declined in many degrees of publicness, and thus operate according to varying rules and laws. Yet, as I will demonstrate in this article, the architecture of private property, with a marked focus on the architecture of dwellings, arises as existentially significant because of the functions which it enables and protects. Commonplace definitions of what constitutes a good "dwelling" or "house" allude to human necessity, but ultimately fall short of providing us with true housing adequacy. This, I posit, is because they limit their scope to physical features (walls, windows, floors, doors, roofs) and their delimitation of a private inside, opposed to a public outside. They do so, however, without clarifying those very essential human functions. To be sure, housing architectures are constituted of basic, physical elements; they allow for a form of domestic life which can

hardly take place in streets, parks and urban squares. Why is this the case? Why must something be done inside and not outside the house? In this article, I return to the seminal works of Jeremy Waldron and Richard Epstein in order to clarify what is at stake with the principles of adequacy and property which oversee one's life in dwelling. I comment on the functions of publicly and privately built infrastructures, considering notions of individual freedom and flourishing. "Why must something be done inside and not outside the house?" is another way of asking "Why are dwellings so necessary to us?"—returning to this straightforward interrogation, and examining it in light of a rights-based tradition of political philosophy, allows for an improved understanding of contemporary architectural challenges. In the concluding part of my examination, I make use of different scenarios to highlight the tension following from stringent boundaries in societies where individuals' right to adequate dwelling is not fulfilled. In particular, I recuperate Alejandra Mancilla's cosmopolitanist reasoning on the old right of necessity and apply it explicitly to urban situations, where public and private boundaries order the sustenance of human life. This leads to new considerations on the policing of urban spaces, and on the duties of states in ensuring the fulfillment of the right to adequate dwelling (or right to housing).

Before I start this investigation, I need to clarify the important difference between the "right to housing" and "housing rights." The former term refers to a moral right. It is a justificatory argument, a condition which relates to licit individual interests, and which is informed by sociocultural norms or standards. The latter term refers to a legal right, to conditions granted by statutes. Housing rights are concerned with statutory features, or law entitlements, such as those on which Luisa and Natale depended. In other words, housing rights will describe what provisions might be (content

definition, legality), but not why they ought to be (content justification, morality). This article focusses on the normative framework, examining implications and features of a right to adequate dwelling infrastructures, and exploring the question on what grounds such a right performs. Or simply put, why it exists, and what should be its content in terms of legal protections and provisions. The same conceptual logic applies to the canon “right to the city”, which links back to moral and justificatory arguments. Finally, while the term “housing” evokes a formal specificity that the term “dwelling” fittingly avoids, I use both words interchangeably. Political and activist cultures which mobilize around this issue have, for the most part, adopted the expression “right to housing.” So, I maintain a connection with these cultures by recuperating it literally in my text.

ON INDIVIDUALS’ SITUATED FREEDOM TO BE

I first turn to legal philosopher Jeremy Waldron. His ‘Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom’ (1991) remains to this day one of the most rigorous and spirited philosophical studies of the issue of housing. This account has led prominent scholars to revise their libertarian position on the existence of a human right to an adequate dwelling.³ As the text deals with the nature of vagrancy and public and private ownership, it reveals the complexity of the occupation of space in cities, as well as the impact of housing inadequacy on human dignity, welfare and liberty. Jeremy Waldron begins by reminding the reader of the importance to revise the liberal discourse surrounding an (ever more limited) individual right to be in a place. In a manner which echoes that of famed philosophers of welfare rights, he expresses his frustrations at the lofty-sounding but ultimately inconsistent commitments of liberal theorists, which are here accused of glossing over the questions raised by the absence or the gross inadequacy of housing, and in particular by homelessness. These questions relate to the “most basic principles of liberty”, and so ought to preoccupy us every bit as much as more familiar worries about torture, the suppression of dissent, and other violations of human rights.⁴ Waldron proceeds to detail people’s situated nature, which brings him to call for a complete requalification of what is understood as dignified—adequate—occupations of spaces, be they private or public. What, then, is implied by people’s situated nature? In brief, all actions must be situated. This follows from the simple fact that “everything that is done has to be done somewhere.”⁵ As embodied beings, we are always located. We are not free to perform an act unless there is some place we are free to perform it in. Such statements are banal, but to Waldron they hint at the possibility of speaking of housing as one of the most significant goods, if not “the most significant.”⁶ Or, to rephrase

this in the evocative language of capability, they hint at the possibility of speaking of housing as one of the most significant enablers of essential human functions.

Rights are interrelated and interdependent. The right to a safe, situated place corresponds to the freedom of exercise of all other rights. The idea at play for Waldron is that an individual who has no site of dwelling is completely and at all times at the mercy of others. Crucially, and I will return to this idea, there is no place governed by private property rules or increasingly stringent public property rules where she is allowed to be and do at will. She cannot make use of her most basic functionings as she basically has no right to be anywhere. If our conceptions of human freedom, welfare or autonomy are to relate to a person's most vital interests and functions, we can see how the situated nature of individuals points at the special importance of domestic architecture in relation to the exercise of most basic capabilities. Now, there may not seem anything "particularly autonomous or self-assertive or civically republican or ethically ennobling about sleeping or cooking or urinating."⁷ These are actions and activities that we rarely find referenced in philosophical treaties or doctrines on space. Still, it very much matters when people are not free to perform such actions. Maybe we think that sleeping and excreting aren't dignified actions, but we can nevertheless agree that there is something profoundly, inherently undignified about preventing someone from performing these actions. If a person needs to urinate, what she needs above all as a dignified person is the "freedom to do so in privacy and relative independence of the arbitrary will of anyone else."⁸ Waldron wants his readers to realize that the access to an adequate dwelling literally corresponds to the freedom to be in some delimited, physical place—at least one place—to undertake basic human functions. Remember that if we are not at liberty to undertake these basic

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AND AT ALL TIMES
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activities, we are not, properly stated, able to live at all. Consequently, impairment of normal functioning through housing inadequacy constitutes a fundamental injustice: a harmful restriction on one's capabilities, on her individual freedom and on individual opportunity related to our "normal, species-typical" opportunity range.⁹ Or, to put it plainly, impairment of normal functioning through housing inadequacy constitutes a severe right violation.

Let me shortly return to *Il Tetto*. When I spoke of Luisa and Natale's little shack, I associated it with commonplace imaginaries of control and identifiable boundaries, with notions of refuge and individuality. This ought to be emphasized, the existential importance of one's dwelling goes beyond the provision of life-sustaining material equipment. It must also provide for security of possession and tranquility. Walls of houses shall not be trespassed, windows shall not be shattered, nor shall doors be forced open. What is found inside one's house, bodies, objects or resources, must be shielded for this house to be deemed adequate. The



VITTORIO DE SICA, *IL TETTO* (1956)

haven that our young Italian couple hurriedly erected overnight provides them with tools of subsistence, but also with the abovementioned security of possession and tranquility. These provisions are equally important and interconnected. They jointly participate in enabling individuals' basic functions. Interestingly, one key aspect of the institution of private property is shown here. As an institution, property is a salutary social arrangement which ensures a more functional, safe and peaceful life with others.¹⁰ Private property has been broadly celebrated as that which can

guarantee independence by providing the material basis for self-reliance, as well as that which can secure a space free from the arbitrary power of other individuals (a critical form of self-defense against outer domination or abuse). And it is no coincidence that the latter feature recalls Waldron's portrayal of persons without dwelling as "completely and at all times at the mercy of others," and needing the "freedom, privacy and relative independence of the arbitrary will of anyone else." To be housed holds an existential significance. As they work to guarantee a certain level of security and the satisfaction of our basic needs, we accept and respect property arrangements.¹¹ These arrangements are formalized as the built infrastructure of villages, towns and cities. In 'Property and Necessity' (1990), Richard A. Epstein confirms these advantages, when he discusses the "powerful," "wonderful idea" of private property as a legal and sociocultural model.¹² While he warns his readership that such a model cannot define a complete state of affairs between individuals, and that it must allow for holdouts, Epstein demonstrates the beneficial effects of these property rights in terms of personal freedom, welfare, and skill development. As new dwellers, Luisa and Natale can now enjoy the institutionalized protection of their physical person and possessions. They can rest assured, and so, hope to flourish.

LIFE-SUSTAINING APPROPRIATENESS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ARCHITECTURES, WITH REMARKS ON HOUSES

In light of these security-related features of property, natural interrogations arise. Is it an unreasonable assumption to equate the infrastructure which allows for basic human activities with *the architecture of housing*? What are the different relations of property which might bring safety and tranquility about? Can individuals not achieve subsistence and security of possession in other built environments? Are public spaces really not fit for sustaining such bodily life and

development? After all, Waldron's 'Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom' presents a conceptual defense of one's right to a place, not a house. It first looks like that those essential actions and activities which we carry on in our home could simply be carried on elsewhere. This greatly diminishes the significance of dwelling adequacy in a rights perspective, as individuals who are not properly housed are at liberty to undertake these important actions elsewhere. Such a refutation has been prompted against homeless individuals and anti-homelessness activists when they invoke the human right to a house. The reply goes along the line that being housed is not the only condition or space to undertake situated acts like cooking, sleeping, showering, and so on. Under this view, a defense of housing-related bodily considerations simply proves the importance of our individual right to some kind of place—this doesn't mean that this place should be a house. It might be, indeed, a public space, like a municipal restroom, a street bench or a subway platform. It could be an underpass, a free urban camping, a gazebo in the town hall's gardens. To homeless individuals, these sites are accessible on account of their outer, open-air situation. This simple insight reminds us of where we began. There exists an architectural inside and outside; both inside and outside spaces operate according to a given set of rules—a bundle of property laws. A stringent set of rules protects architectural "insides" (houses, but also schools, banks, shops) and their occupants in ways that allow them to safely undertake various life-enabling doings. If public spaces are to be understood as the negative of buildings, or architectural "outsides," a different set of rules is enforced.¹³ What's more, these very rules often tend to work against the realization and protection of individual, essential functions.

Admittedly, it has become increasingly difficult to ignore the current, severe forms of policing one's actions in public places. This phenomenon is observable in cities across the Global North and South.¹⁴ A large number of laws prohibit behaviors that we have identified as necessary to the accomplishment of basic human activities. Think of barbecuing in a city park (one must eat), sleeping overnight in a bus shelter (one must sleep), bathing in a retention basin (one must wash) or urinating in the street (one must excrete). We are forbidden to carry out these acts in many public sites. The rules regulating what one is free to do in such sites frequently turn out to be as stringent and exclusive as those exerted by private property owners. This puts individuals back in a position where they have to ask for permission (from public authorities) to undertake the basic functions that make life possible, thereby violating their personal freedom to do so. So, the right to undertake these basic functions seems to demand more than the right to be in a public space, or any space. It implies the possibility

of occupying an architectural “inside.” Now, there exists instances of outer, open-air sites where propertyless individuals are allowed to undertake basic, bodily actions and activities. Think for a start of the wide outdoors of Norway or Sweden, where a long-established *Allemannsretten* (right to roam) ensures everyone’s access to the resources and space of the wilderness. Though I focus here on villages, towns and cities; defining public spaces as the negative of built infrastructure does suppose a minimum concentration of buildings. Architectural traditions of public restrooms (Singapore leads by example) are still present in several urban centers. So are municipal washbasins (Portuguese *lavatórios públicos*, among others) and drinking fountains (see the Cochabamba public water facilities, established after the activist pressure of the *Bolivian Coordinadora para la Defensa del Agua y de la Vida*). In North Africa, communal bread ovens, an institution of their own, guarantee one’s possibility to bake. Long *iftar* (fast-breaking) tables are deployed in the streets of many Near and Middle Eastern cities. Such formal typologies still stand, but in diminished numbers. Since the modernization and privatization of household equipment, many of them were effectively dismantled and abandoned, and refashioned inside the domestic space.¹⁵ Stricter policing of streets, squares or urban parks ensued: law infringements and displays of so-called inappropriate behavior in common urban environments are known to be disciplined with hefty fines. It appears that, for a critical number of extant (homeless) individuals, their right to carry out basic bodily functions does necessitate more than the right to be in a public space, thus pointing to the occupation of an architectural “inside.” But should these “insides” be *de facto* houses?

I argue that they should. The aforesaid principles of security of possession and tranquility are hardly ensured in drop-in shelters, charity dormitories, and other public refuges, where permanent

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occupancy and object storage are, to a large extent, proscribed. Without sturdy dividing walls, safe storage, padlocks or the likes, one lacks the privacy and the autonomy of dignified life, and is left in a position of vulnerability.¹⁶ We already know that lacking a permanent house already means to expose one's body to numerous threats and deprivations, which incapacitate homeless individuals in ways that prevent them to lead a decent or minimally-good existence (even less a flourishing one). The straightforward value of our reflection on commonplace imaginaries of control and identifiable boundaries lies in showing us that even in cases where their bodies are sheltered within walls and under roofs, people remain critically incapacitated. As private architectural "insides", houses participate in good mental health as much as in good physical one. Without these dimensions of security, tranquility, intimacy, and so on, public shelters can't be places where one develops and makes good use of her basic functions. If a situated place to be doesn't provide us with



VITTORIO DE SICA, *IL TETTO* (1956)

the freedom, privacy and relative independence from the arbitrary will of anyone else, it remains deeply inadequate. Recalling living out in the streets or in temporary shelters, many individuals spoke of a feeling that they didn't (have the capability to) have a life worth living, as if their individual resilience had derived from solid walls which were no longer.¹⁷ Vittorio De Sica's dramatic script plays on this idea that, as new "homeowners," Luisa and Natale can truly begin to live. In a few words, we need here to consider the different modes of ownership—or, to formulate it in an Epsteinian manner, the different relations of property, which enable the

good exercise of people's most basic activities. I follow UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements program for human settlements and sustainable urban development, in identifying "secure tenure" as the important feature in one's relation of property to housing.¹⁸ Secure tenure refers to legal recognition of one's control over her living space, through ownership *or* usufruct. This is really key. Individuals can assuredly achieve adequacy in dwelling through rental situations; despite the widespread association of the advantages of private property with home ownership, usufruct forms of tenure can allow for security of possession and tranquility.¹⁹ In all cases, it is my opinion that they only do so when non-owners (tenants on the private rental market and in public social housing) have a reasonable level of control over the place that they occupy, and when permanent place attachment is made possible through strong rent contract protections. The details fall outside the scope of my brief exploration here, but it is important to stress that adequate usufruct can enable basic, housing-contingent functions.

THE RIGHT OF NECESSITY REVISITED

We have established the importance of dwelling architecture: while it may vary in size or shape, the inner place that we call home enables essential actions and activities. To be deprived of housing is a direct threat to one's existence. This interrelation is reflected by the human right to housing and its associated claims and duties. Walls, doors, windows, ceilings and floors are more than ordinary material arrangements. They protect our bodies and minds, they allow for our most vital interests and functions to be realized, and to develop. And, given this special, situated importance, they are themselves protected by potent property laws. In the last part of this article, I utilize the political philosophy of Alejandra Mancilla to clarify the moral underpinnings of property rights. In particular, I examine the weighty

ways in which this “bundle of rights” relates to dire housing deprivation and needs.²⁰ Mancilla’s thought-provoking writings on moral cosmopolitanism and global poverty shed new light on the permissibility of actions in the face of such housing deprivation, by advocating the right of necessity, a right of the needy to take the material resources they need for subsistence, from those who are not similarly needy.²¹ It is a privilege (absence of duty not to take others’ possessions to ensure one’s own subsistence) as well as a claim (you have a duty not to stop the needy from taking your possessions). While it first seems at odds with the institution of private property, the right of necessity is actually consistent with accepting its very legitimacy. Richard Epstein reminds us that the recognition of the right of necessity is, in effect, one of the internal limitations which ought to be included in any such legitimate institution, an escape valve of sorts. A system of exceptions based upon strong, if variegated, perceptions of necessity, is necessary to people’s endorsement of private property as a prime social arrangement.²² The moral intuition at play is that no system of property entitlements that could “reasonably command the acceptance of all who are subject to it” could include a requirement that an individual starve or freeze to death as the cost of respecting the proprietary rights of others over what one needs to survive.²³ In emergency scenarios of necessity, and as a means of last resort, the law must allow for entries upon land and interference with personal property that would otherwise have been trespass. Alejandra Mancilla builds from this operation of justification, arguing that it is unreasonable to restrict the right of necessity to emergency cases, when the global economic order is structured in a way that maintains millions in a precarious state. Or, to realign this line of thought to the present paper: it is unreasonable to do so when housing markets worldwide are structured in ways that maintain many in a precarious state with regard to dwelling adequacy.

Consider the four following scenarios. 1) While on a hiking trip on some high mountain plateau, you get lost without proper clothing and equipment. You are alone, exposed, and frozen. But you finally spot a hut in the distance. When you go there, you find its door locked. You then proceed to break one window, crawl inside and find shelter until aid comes. 2) On a sail trip with your family, a violent storm breaks out. You manage to approach some private pier and moor your boat to it, guaranteeing you and your family’s safety, and protecting the boat from material damages. 3) You are a homeless individual in the cold winter night. The town’s drop-in refuge is situated at too long a walking distance, and you are fighting sleep. You are alone, exposed, and frozen. Spotting a tenement building with an empty ground floor, you go there and find its door locked. You

then proceed to break one window, crawl inside and find shelter until the day comes. 4) You are a homeless individual in the extreme heatwave of the summer. You feel weak, debilitated by heat exhaustion. No one offers you water or help. You climb over the fence of a private courtyard and jump in the fresh pool, cooling your body down. These four scenarios describe emergency situation where one's subsistence is at stake, but 1) and 2) are often more readily accepted as invocations of the right of necessity.²⁴ As Mancilla puts it well,

in our current world, acceptance of the right of necessity remains confined to cases of one-off, mostly naturally caused emergencies. ... This means that if an individual takes someone else's property and claims that he did so because his right to subsistence was unmet, he will probably end up punished by society and by the law: common morality tends to sanction property infringements almost with no exceptions, and legal systems reject exculpation based on extreme poverty or indigence.²⁵

We should ask ourselves: should we uphold a narrow conception of the right of necessity when current urban and economic arrangements, and their related application of property rights, have not been designed in a manner that guarantees access to minimum material provisions for all? Entry upon land and interference with personal property do appear reasonable and acceptable in urban milieus which lack the infrastructure to provide the needy with housing. This is a provocative statement, especially when contrasted with our past examination of the importance of security of possession and tranquility: the claim which follows from the invocation of one's right of necessity (well-off individuals mustn't prevent a destitute person from taking their possessions) proves to be extremely demanding. I have pleaded that a house is not a standing reserve, or an investment opportunity, but the armature for self-integrity and bodily security:

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it ought not to be violated. Human freedom, autonomy, health, dignity, agency— these notions are to be safeguarded by enforcing property rights, because such rights suppose a basic guarantee of security. Controlling one's own home is an immediate expression of one's will. Freedom is not something which just occurs in thought. It requires some physical domain outside the person's own mind where she can actualize her will, without external interference. Yet again, if subsistence cannot be ensured in public spaces, or through welfare programs and social architecture, necessity can justify the infringement of one's home. But this is an untenable prospect for any functional, organized society. I believe that these tensions (and our overall normative findings on property, necessity and the architecture of housing) reveal the special responsibility of states in ensuring their citizens' vital human activities and interests, through the realization of housing adequacy for all. In other words, it is morally incumbent on states to rearrange property provisions in a way that does not leave the houseless in a position where they may legitimately invoke their right of necessity.²⁶ Housing shortages and deprivations are attributable to the way in which current human institutions are framed. Cultures such as ours, where ordinary circumstances consist in severe housing inadequacy co-existing with extreme wealth and luxurious dwelling (according to numbers collated in recent years, "more than 11 million homes lied empty in Europe alone, enough to house all of the continent's homeless twice over"),²⁷ must undergo change. Through redistributive policies, projects and statutes, governments are best suited for implementing such a change.

The ramifying details of housing-related duties borne by states deserve a separate investigation. Suffice it to conclude by asserting that in a hypothetical society where the universal fulfillment of the human right to housing is guaranteed under normal circumstances, the exercise of the right of necessity would be confined to exceptional situations like scenarios 1) and 2). And until such hypothetical societies become reality, and while they work on the implementation of new housing schemes (construction of social units, rent caps, expropriations of speculative architecture), state authorities should refrain from strictly policing certain open spaces in the city. *Il Tetto's* Luisa and Natale could attempt at building and keeping their shack because the regulations of 1950s Rome allowed for people to secure their right to a parcel of land and house if they manage to construct the latter without being stopped by the authorities. This suggests something like the beginning of a humanist attitude of tolerance and flexibility (or even a sense of justice) in the face of immediate, bodily necessity. Similarly, we can think of the Chilean *callamperos* (urban propertyless), a group of working-class people who, between the 1950s and 1970s, became

known for occupying some empty patches of Santiago overnight. Remarkably, these *callamperos* were rarely evicted. If municipal actors tried to pursue this path of eviction, the *callamperos* resisted pacifically until the latter gave up. This amounted to a tacit approval of their occupying actions by the authorities, as well as the surrounding city dwellers.²⁸ These two historical cases teach us a worthy lesson. The infrastructure of housing is expansive and expensive: given the impossibility of immediate remediation of what were severe shortages of dwelling, the municipal governments of Rome and Santiago showed leniency towards what was allowed in the open air, public spaces of their cities. We should follow their example, as of today and in coming times of housing crises.

ENDNOTES

1. Richard A. Epstein, 'Property and Necessity', *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol.3, 1990, 4.
2. Property and its declinations in private, common or communal subgroups refers to the rules that govern people's access to and control of things: it is a feature of human cultures across the world. Yet, it must be stressed that a lot of African, Indian, Asian, or North American indigenous architecture are articulated around deeply different notions of privacy and publicness, privileging togetherness in ways that make little importance of walls and hard boundaries (think of the Jewish kibbutz, one example among other). This topic is deserving of a stand-alone study, and so falls outside the scope of the present paper.
3. Peter King, 'Housing as a freedom right', *Housing Studies*, Vol.18, No.5, 2011, 661.
4. Jeremy Waldron, 'Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom', *UCLA Law Review* 295, 1992, 296
5. *Ibid.*, 296.
6. *Ibid.*, 296.

7. Ibid., 296.
8. Ibid., 321-322.
9. Norman Daniels, 'Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice', *Philosophy of Public Affairs*, Vol.4, No.2, 219.
10. Alejandra Mancilla, *The Right of Necessity: Moral Cosmopolitanism and Global Poverty* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 15.
11. Mancilla, *The Right of Necessity*, 15.
12. Epstein, 'Property and Necessity', 3-4.
13. Again, there exists many examples of non-Western cultures where (for reasons linked to social traditions, climate, and so on) the difference between inside and outside is much more diffused—it is softer than the hard limits of walls and fences that we associate with the division of space in Western cultures.
14. UN-Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing*, 2009; https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/fs21_rev_1_housing_en.pdf.
15. Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation*, 2011; https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-33-Add4_en.pdf.
16. Carol McNaughton Nicholls, *Transitions through Homelessness: Lives on the Edge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17.
17. McNaughton Nicholls, *Transitions through Homelessness*, 17.
18. UN-Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing*.
19. Stuart Hodkinson, 'The Return of the Housing Question', *Ephemera | Theory & Politics in Organization*, Vol.12, No.4, 2012, 426.
20. Epstein, 'Property and Necessity', 2-3.
21. Alejandra Mancilla quoted in Garrett Cullity, 'Mancilla, Alejandra. The Right of Necessity', *Ethics*, No.128, 2017, 260.
22. Epstein, 'Property and Necessity', 7-8.
23. Cullity, 'Mancilla, Alejandra. The Right of Necessity', 261.
24. We tend to assume that it is no fault of the hiker or the sailor that they find themselves using someone else's property—they were unlucky, trapped in a hostile landscape; the hut or the pier was the only possible option available to ensure their physical security. On the other hand, we tend to assume—and quite uncharitably so—personal failure and fault when it comes to homeless individuals' struggles for necessity; plus, cities are dense environments, with a (presupposed) network of available resources. According to this logic, violating someone's property cannot be a means of last resort for 3) or 4).
25. Mancilla, *The Right of Necessity*, 71.
26. Ibid., 71.

27. Rupert Neate, 'Scandal of Europe's 11m empty homes', 2014; <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/23/europe-11m-empty-properties-enough-house-homeless-continent-twice> (accessed 2020-03-17).
28. Mancilla, *The Right of Necessity*, 87-88.



PROTESTS IN HONG KONG (2019)

ANONYMITY IN JIANGHU: HONG KONG'S URBAN SPACE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

ESTHER LORENZ

The storming of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong by a group of local activists on July 1, 2019 marked a turn of events in what was until then the largest ever series of political demonstrations in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory. In the months that followed, Hong Kong was shaken by violence and unrest unseen since the riots in the 1960s against the British Colonial rule. The emergence of these scenes of total chaos in a city where safety and efficiency of shared urban space and infrastructure are enormously valued and sustained at highest levels effectively generated a fundamental sense of destabilization. This article introduces an ancient Chinese cultural notion, *jianghu*, with the aim of contributing to an enriched and differentiated cultural understanding of these events and the transformation of urban space they effected.

The first part introduces *jianghu* in contrast to the dichotomy of the public and the private so deeply rooted in Western civilization. The comparison is not so much about suggesting *jianghu* as a substitute concept to replace existing interpretations entirely, but an attempt and an invitation to open new perspectives of understanding of a place that is the hybrid result of a complexity of cultural influences and unique historical and political circumstances. The section that follows outlines an image of Hong Kong as a city during times of peace, as well as a very brief account of its political history, to provide the background for the subsequent description and interpretation of a Hong Kong shaken by protests as a contemporary form of *jianghu*. The last portion of the essay describes the actions within and the transformation of urban spaces during the violent

protests in Hong Kong between July and November 2019 to illustrate the congruence between characteristics of *jianghu* as known from Chinese film and literature and the events that deeply unsettled the Hong Kong territory.

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC

The question of public space from a Western perspective is grounded in the dichotomy of public and private inherent in an understanding of the city that is deeply rooted in the Greek *polis*. While the existence of and stability of the family is a precondition for a productive engagement in public life in the ancient city-state, the duality between the two realms is distinct. Aristotle speaks about two lives that exist in parallel.¹ As Hannah Arendt points out, Greek society maintains a sharp distinction between the home and the family on the one hand—dedicated to a life grounded in biological association and characterized by command—and political organization on the other—negotiated through the process of persuasion.²

In Chinese culture, grown from its own ancient roots, this sharp distinction between public and private has never taken place. The family, like in the Greek *polis*, is at the beginning of society, and in Chinese culture it is also at its core. Rather than forming a parallel realm, socio-political structures grow in expansion from the notion of the family and the home, and are deeply rooted in Confucianist thought. They establish a societal and spatial framework distinctly different from that in the West that Li Shiqiao identifies as “degrees of care.”³

This resonates with the conception of *tianxia*, a term that dates back to philosophical writings from the Zhou period and that maintained a steady influence throughout China’s history. It literally translates as “all under heaven” and denotes a normative “world” that can be understood as the largest existing form of the family, deeply imbued with Confucian values of morality and hierarchy. Zhao Tingyang discusses the “isomorphism between family and *tianxia*” during the Zhou dynasty that ties together a political order of *tianxia* providing protection for each family with an ethical order that extends “family relationality into the *tianxia* institutional order.”⁴ *Tianxia* establishes a hierarchy grounded in morality and power and acted out by paying tributes, which correspond to giving respect to parents and ancestors within a family. Zhao points out the all-inclusiveness of *tianxia* as its fundamental characteristic that leads to a conception of an interiorization of the entire world with “no outside.”⁵

Yet, there are gaps that emerge between the extended circles of familial care, and there are limits to their capacity to be all-encompassing. There are positions of rejection and projections of alternative worlds. There are individuals who deliberately withdraw themselves from the hierarchical,

established order, acting upon a variety of motives. In fiction and in reality this realm outside the normative order is known as *jianghu*.

JIANGHU – AN EXTERNAL REALM OF NON-STRUCTURED ACTION

Jianghu is a Chinese cultural concept that literally translates as “rivers and lakes.” The term can be traced back to the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi. In his writings the term denotes a life freed from officialdom, career aspirations and family ties. He uses “rivers and lakes” synonymously with the Way, the *Tao*, the natural realm for man and his thinking that is characterized by purposelessness and detachment.⁶ Zhuang Zi’s writings in a political sense promote non-hierarchical, dynamic organization of human life.⁷

Over time the term has developed a rich spectrum of meaning both through fiction as well as through history. The aspect that remains constant between the evolving uses and interpretations of this concept is that *jianghu* establishes a position outside regulated systems, from which these can be reflected on, opposed, and overturned. This logic appears as a frequent feature in the narratives of Chinese martial arts tales and movies, commonly described as *wuxia*. The most influential tale to date to describe the realm of *jianghu* in relation to *wuxia* is the novel *Outlaws of the Marsh or Water Margin* (水滸傳, by Shi Nai’an, 14th century), situated in the period of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The book tells the story of 108 rebels who, frustrated by the political environment and the living conditions at that time, “became leaders of an outlaw army of thousands and fought brave and resourceful battles against pompous, heartless tyrants.”⁸ The protagonists withdraw from their everyday lives and hide in the marshes of Liangshan in Shandong province to prepare for and to conduct the fight for justice against the corrupt ruling order. While regular society is hierarchical and highly structured, *jianghu* does not have structure, it relies on alliances

“ IN CHINESE CULTURE, A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HAS NEVER TAKEN PLACE. THE FAMILY IS AT THE BEGINNING OF SOCIETY, AND IS ALSO AT ITS CORE.”

and honor codes that are fluid and subject to change.

As the conceptual dwelling place for itinerant performers, healers, swordsmen, beggars, and outlaws both in real life as well as in fiction, *jianghu* forms the antithesis to home and the family. In martial arts tales, *jianghu* is frequently treated as a realm that one can enter, but also again leave, to return to home and family. It is distinct from *shanlin*, “mountains and forests,” the retreat for Daoist monks and hermits. While *shanlin* is a place for non-action and spiritual contemplation, *jianghu* is characterized by action that is committed to effecting change in society.⁹

In contemporary contexts, *jianghu* appears in academic discussions on the arts and the digital as a potential new realm that enables evasion of government control and censorship. But *jianghu* is different from Habermas’ public sphere, where society can openly debate issues of common concern. It is in fact a space external to societal structures and conventions, from which counter concepts can be envisioned, and battles against oppressive, corrupt, or unjust authorities can be fought.

Jianghu may denote the retreat from a regulated life, opposition to government in the fight for justice, lawlessness, or personal freedom; it signifies both a mental state and a space. While consistently implying some form of rejection of a status quo, it has remained vague and malleable in its interpretation, and in relation to specific socio-political conditions of any given era.

GOVERNMENTAL CARE AS THE NORMATIVE HONG KONG

Hong Kong is a city with an extremely high population and building density. The spatial compression produces a three-dimensional urban fabric of short distances. In conjunction with a highly efficient public transportation infrastructure, the city is primarily navigated on foot, only 7.6% of the population own a private vehicle.¹⁰ Due to this prevalence of pedestrianism, Hong Kong’s population density is directly reflected in the mass of moving bodies that traverse the city through this three-dimensional pedestrian network. These spaces are not made for pause, contemplation or flânerie, they are spaces of flow designed to provide the most convenient, smooth, and rapid connections between places of living, work, education, and leisure. This priority is also reflected in the organization of the spaces themselves—surface markings on the floor and overhead signals, reminiscent of highway guidance systems, control the use of lanes and direction of flows, turnstiles and rail guards manage access and zoning, elevated walkways and metal barriers provide clear separation between pedestrian and vehicle space.

Life in Hong Kong is characterized by an enormous dedication to maintaining the constancy, safety, and efficiency of this flow through a high

degree of management exerted by the government. While these spatial parameters and approach to governing are symptomatic of the needs of a city of a material and human density as extreme as in Hong Kong, conversely, the unique morphology and tight organization of the city must be recognized as the result of an underlying sociocultural framework that enables its formation and sustains its vitality. If seen through a Chinese cultural perspective, according to Li Shiqiao, the approach of the Hong Kong government may need to be understood as one of all-encompassing care,¹¹ including the provision of open spaces and leisure facilities that are accessible to all, but that do not inherently constitute public space in a political sense. The level of care by the government in maintaining order is matched by a high level of compliance from its citizens. The cultural basis for this general tolerance of guidance, rules, and restrictions in Hong Kong's population is often explained through notions of Confucianism, which resonates with the understanding of the city as nested scales of familial care that also implies loyalty and respect toward government. Hong Kong ranks among the safest cities in the world.¹² For the average citizen violence is an extrinsic phenomenon. During normal, peaceful times, space, management and conformity are tight, and seem not to leave gaps outside the realm of governmental care, with few exceptions. In Hong Kong, highways, roads, and scarce instances of vacant or abandoned land, dangerous and unfit for bodily occupation, can be understood as spatial manifestations of *jianghu*, while triad operations embody the social manifestation of "rivers and lakes," as the world of "bandits" that runs in parallel and exists hidden from and outside the realm of the established order. For most Hong Kong citizens *jianghu* does not touch upon their everyday lives but exists in a world of literary and cinematic fiction.

In contrast to this perception of stability and largely friction-free everyday collective life in the city

of Hong Kong there lies an inner struggle, which is rooted in the precarious political situation that is fundamental to Hong Kong's existence—first as a British Colony following the Opium Wars, and since the handover of the territory to China in 1997, as a “Special Administrative Region” of the People's Republic of China, operating under the motto of “one country, two systems.” The identity of Hong Kong people, who are largely comprised of immigrants from Mainland China and their descendants—92% of Hong Kong's population are ethnically Chinese—has developed its own characteristics overtime, with a self-conception distinctly different from the mainland, and at the same time deeply rooted in Chinese culture given their ancestral heritage. For many of these immigrants, their transition to Hong Kong can be interpreted as constituting various forms of “entering *jianghu*” in relation to Mainland China, either as a realm “outside” allowing for alternative lifestyles and opportunities or as a place to evade the control of the Central Government.

While Hong Kong had been open to Western ideas and influences since the incremental ceding of the territory to the British, starting in 1842, throughout its time as a colony it had been ruled by a governor who was directly appointed by the British monarch. The governing efforts of the British colonial rule prioritized the maintenance of stability conducive to the flourishing of trade and commerce. Absent of substantial provisions of democratic institutions and processes, a public sphere in the sense of Jürgen Habermas had not been established by the time of the handover in 1997.¹³

The ambiguity of the Basic Law with regard to instituting universal suffrage, in combination with the stipulation that the Chief Executive is to be appointed by the Central Government based on a selection “through election or through consultations,” present provisions perhaps less committed than what contemporary supporters of democracy sometimes refer to as “promises.”¹⁴ Moreover, the impending end of the 50-year period of Hong Kong's semi-autonomy in 2047 constitutes a looming threat that is virtually inescapable. This is exacerbated by instances of attempted introductions of new laws that seem to threaten both Hong Kong's identity and stipulated level of independence. To Hong Kong's citizens these appear as premature steps of the realization of Hong Kong's full absorption into China—whatever this final scenario may look like in the future—which are feared to violate the provision in the basic law that the “The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.”¹⁵ In the past these incidents triggered otherwise rare political demonstrations in Hong Kong,

such as the protests in 2003 against a new national security law, and the demonstrations against the introduction of a curriculum of “moral and national education” in Hong Kong’s education system in 2012.¹⁶

The proposition of a new extradition law in 2019 that would allow criminal suspects to be surrendered to China for trial not only triggered vehement rejection by the Hong Kong people, but it also sparked more violent and sustained forms of activism, unseen in the territory for over half a century, and unprecedented in some of their characteristics and ways of utilizing and transforming the spaces of the city. Given Hong Kong’s political and cultural hybridity, we need differentiated perspectives to think with and through the events that took place in this unique territory.

HONG KONG’S SPACE OF CRISIS AS JIANGHU

The protests against the extradition law in 2019 are to date considered the largest political demonstrations that have ever taken place in Hong Kong, culminating in up to two million citizens—more than a quarter of the territory’s population—gathering in the streets on June 16, 2019.¹⁷ They came out in opposition to the proposed bill, and in protest against the Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s decision two days earlier to only suspend rather than drop the bill.¹⁸

The week before, on June 12, a smaller demonstration in front of the government offices turned violent when protesters threw bricks and metal rods at the police, who in return responded with the use of batons, pepper spray and tear gas.¹⁹ In a response on the same day, Lam expressed her disapproval of the incident and reiterated her rejection of the demonstrators’ demands through familial metaphors: “If I let him have his way every time my son acts this way, I believe we will have a good relationship in the short term. But if

I indulge his wayward behaviour, he might regret it after he grows up.”²⁰ This statement is revealing of the government’s self-conceived parental role towards its citizens. In any case it did not resonate well with Hong Kong’s youth. The accumulative effect of the reactions by the government in the early summer of 2019 such as this one may in fact have unleashed deep-seated disappointment and desperation in Hong Kong’s young generation, who felt increasingly not taken care of at all. These sentiments would certainly be grounded in the fear of their cultural identity, values, and way of life being jeopardized by the impending end of the “one country two systems” stipulation well during their lifetime. These emotions may have additionally been exacerbated by the progressive vanishing of perspectives in a Hong Kong characterized by an ever-expanding wealth gap in its population, driven by an extreme combination of land policy and capitalist real estate practices that go all the way back to British colonial rule.

On July 1, 2019, the anniversary of Hong Kong’s handover to China, a group of activists broke into the Legislative Council building, smashed the façade and vandalized the interior, sprayed over the flag of Hong Kong in the Council chamber, and—strangely enough—raised the British Colonial flag in its stead. This sudden shift to violence marked “an irreversible step toward escalation”²¹ and a clear crystallization of two very distinct groups of protesters: The first group represented the large majority of those demonstrating peacefully and within the boundaries authorized for the rallies. While they did express their support for democratic values, they raised their voices specifically against the extradition law. After the announcement of its suspension, despite lingering disappointment with this incomplete concession, these large demonstrations came to an end. The anger and dissatisfaction of the second group—comprised of several disparate fractions of predominantly young people—did not dissipate. In contrary, they grew even stronger. These protesters turned to active aggression to provoke a strong response from the government. They expanded their demands—which functioned less as an agenda for political negotiation than as a declaration of the government’s failings—to a total of five with remarkably varying political weight, ranging from universal suffrage to elect the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive to amnesty for themselves irrespective of the nature of their actions.

The distinction between these two types of demonstrators is relevant for the discussion at hand. The first group, while expressing disagreement and staging dramatic scenes of the city’s tight spaces packed with people, acted in full compliance with the rules and within behavioral conventions. In contrast, the moment of storming the Legislative Council building and the sudden shift to violence of the second group, I argue, can be understood

as an act of self-withdrawal by the activists from the familial care of the Hong Kong government and from the order of its societal structure, triggered by the sense of abandonment described above. It marks their entry into the realm of *jianghu*. This explanation is supported by the radical change in the behavior of these activists: the occupation of spaces not designed for sojourn, general conduct opposing governmental and societal norms, the remaining in a tenacious position of opposition throughout the government's various attempts to open a dialogue, the active use of violence, the wilful embracing of danger, and the blurring of identities. On the surface these manifestations may not appear any different from political activism and unrest in other places, however, in Hong Kong more than anywhere else, these stand in stark contradiction to the territory's normative way of life, and importantly, to the young activists' own disciplined conforming to these prior to the crisis: "They were becoming something different from what they were, a metamorphosis that would have been difficult to imagine in orderly Hong Kong, a city where you line up neatly for an elevator door and crowds don't step into an empty street until the signal changes."²²

In what follows, I will lay out the corresponding implications in terms of the use and adaptation, movement within, and re-conceptualization of the urban spaces involved, all of which, I argue, constitute contemporary manifestations of *jianghu*.

INHABITING AND TRANSFORMING THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF FLOWS

At first, Victoria Park formed the primary gathering and starting point for the formally organized demonstrations against the extradition bill. As the largest park in Hong Kong, it serves as a frequent location for regular public events, including the annual Tiananmen vigil (suspended since 2019). After a while, the movement shifted from Victoria Park to transitory spaces in the city

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such as shopping mall atria, underpasses, elevated walkways, tram stops, roads, highways, traffic islands, and the footings of freeway columns; precisely those spaces that are dedicated to ensuring efficient traffic flow—pedestrian or motorized—that are either not designed or even prohibited for sojourn. The choice of locations and the actions taken within them not only ensured greater visibility and impact of the movement, but they also led to a material and conceptual transformation of these spaces. They were rendered dysfunctional through the protesters' actions that caused traffic to slow down or to come to a complete stand-still. This constituted a direct confrontation with both the government and the order of everyday life in the city. Hong Kong's urban density further potentiated the effectiveness of these blockages due to its large population relying on only few high-performing infrastructural arteries for their daily commutes.

On the one hand, the transformation of these transitional spaces was established through the bodily movement and occupation of the protesters, which broke with common societal norms in Hong Kong. On the other hand, the spatial mutation was achieved by the physical alteration of the spaces themselves: The walls of underground tunnels and pedestrian bridges leading to major transport hubs—usually characterized by mute and sanitary tile or glass surfaces—were covered with post-its and flyers. In aggregation these formed a thick pixelated tapestry of Chinese poetry, messages offering emotional support, calls for political change, and practical announcements. Guardrails along pedestrian sidewalks were dismantled only to be rearranged into various forms of barricades, physically and metaphorically breaking with rules and regulations that shape Hong Kong's everyday life. Roads and highways were sprinkled with arrangements of paving bricks that transformed them into so-called "brick battlegrounds."²³ These were more than simple barricades. The strategic composition and distribution of clusters of bricks presented tactics explicitly aimed at preventing police response. In the process they hindered general road traffic as well. These intentional arrangements produced their own aesthetics through the spatial and material transformation of the road into a new kind of urban landscape that was now inaccessible to cars: a *jianghu* sphere that called for a mode of movement and inhabitation by the human body different from the normative ways of navigating the city; perhaps a new form of *qinggong*—the ability to move lightly and swiftly to "cross difficult terrain and scale walls quickly."²⁴

Roads and highways constitute a most direct analogy between *jianghu* and Hong Kong's physical urban spaces. Resonating with the metaphor of "rivers and lakes" these are spaces for flows of traffic; they are separated, dynamic, and they are dangerous to the unprotected body.

The occupation and transformation of these urban territories establishes *jianghu* both as an alternative space as well as an alternative mode of conduct, radically breaking with normative behavior, while at the same time exerting enormous pressure on the government by blocking the flows of the city that are synonymous with its livelihood and efficiency.

BECOMING WATER

The Umbrella Movement in 2014 had adopted a sedentary approach, which involved the occupation of public sites in three locations in the form of temporary settlements, comprised of tents and managed collectively. In contrast, the 2019 protests developed an entirely different strategy—one of fluidity and anonymity.

The protesters took inspiration from Bruce Lee's quote "be like water," which—albeit originating in popular culture—is a direct reference to the martial arts tradition and the teachings of Taoism.²⁵ They rephrased it to describe their own tactics: Be strong like ice. Be fluid like water. Gather like dew. Scatter like mist. The protests were organized in a dispersed, temporary, and dynamically shifting manner, popping up in various locations, making it difficult to predict when and where they would occur, and for police to respond. The non-hierarchical organization without any identifiable leadership inhibited the police from pinpointing anyone responsible. The gear worn by the activists provided physical protection from teargas and basic equipment for defense and attack, and at the same time, it veiled the wearers' identity, ensuring anonymity despite the omnipresence of security cameras, mobile phone cameras, and press cameras. The quasi-uniform outfit also led to the dissolution of the individual body into the group of acting bodies, foregrounding their alliance and cause, and the impression of both single parts and masses of dynamically changing matter moving in urban space.

With a heightened awareness of urban surveillance technology, activists took an array of measures to incapacitate or bypass it. These ranged from the spraying of surveillance cameras to more sophisticated spatial tactics, such as the occupation of and movement across roofs of buildings and elevated walkways—modes of traversing the city previously only known from Hong Kong’s gangster movies—to evade the field of vision of surveillance cameras in the city’s pedestrian walkway system, effectively hiding in plain sight. They became invisible to the authorities’ cameras and face recognition software yet remained highly visible to Hong Kong citizens looking up from the streetscape, over from adjoining walkways or down from office and residential towers. Hong Kong’s unique morphology and density significantly contributed to the formation as well as the increase in intensity of this confrontation and juxtaposition of the ordered and the unruly, the hidden and the visible. The explicit use of water metaphors led to the protests being named the “Water Revolution” in news coverage.²⁶ The variety of such metaphors used to develop, communicate, and perform protest tactics suggest an overall strategy of becoming water to find anonymity and a segregated space of action in the “rivers and lakes” that are *jianghu*.

DIGITAL JIANGHU

Social media and the internet played a key role in the mobilization and organization of the movement, as well as in developing forms of counter surveillance directed at the authorities through the strategic documentation and subsequent broadcasting of actions conducted by the police. Digital tactics employed by the activists included a combination of online art, forums, and live streaming. Fearful that the Hong Kong government might increasingly adopt measures of internet surveillance and censorship known to be employed in Mainland China, the protesters’ set of social media applications and technologies of data sharing was carefully curated as to not leave any digital traces of their identities. The use of non-mainstream messenger apps—the Telegram application and the local LIHKG Forum — in combination with the use of airdropping via their smartphones to exchange information, enabled them to carve out spaces of anonymity and to set up encoded channels of communication in the digital realm to match their strategies in physical space.²⁷

The working principles and the effectiveness of the social media platforms enabled self-organization without de-fined leadership through real-time aggregation and communication of individual initiative. This corresponds to *jianghu* as an anarchic, dynamic space, in which individuals act alone or in alliances yet without any hierarchical order of command. It

constitutes a parallel realm that stands in opposition to an established societal order and at the same time evades the grip of its control.

THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY JIANGHU IN HONG KONG

In times of normality, *jianghu* exists in films and novels in Chinese culture. In times of crisis and political change, this concept can transform actual spaces into versions of *jianghu* and to create a mental space for retreat from, reflection on, re-projection of, and potentially the overturning of the status quo.

What we witnessed in 2019 in Hong Kong was the emergence of a contemporary form of *jianghu*, as a hybridization of digital space, material space, and spatial practices. In absence of any certainty or promising outlook in the face of the expiry date of Hong Kong's status as Special Administration in 2047 and following a severe loss of trust in their government to uphold and defend the rights of Hong Kong citizens stipulated in the Basic Law, the radical branch of Hong Kong protesters took a momentous step to withdraw themselves from the established order and governmental care to fight for their own vision of political justice. In line with literary accounts of *jianghu*, they produced a new space of action through their own codes and tactics, a parallel world of alternative rules and negotiation of power.²⁸ They radically transformed the space of the city to form the backdrop for their actions and to match their change in conduct. In the ever-increasing escalation of the confrontation between protesters and police the city had turned into a smoking chaos. By late fall 2019 the government had fully withdrawn the extradition bill, though this delayed move failed to generate a substantial sense of resolve. By that time, *jianghu* had fully unfolded in the territory and in the temper of its young adult generation. Clemens von Haselberg describes *jianghu* as a parallel world, as a counterpart to the "public" world of officialdom,

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AND JUXTAPOSITION
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THE HIDDEN AND
THE VISIBLE.”

but also as its mirror.²⁹ The protests aggressively confronted the Hong Kong government, expressing deep dissatisfaction and distrust. At the same time, the sudden cutting of ties with conformist behavior by its youth and their metamorphosis into radical subjects throwing themselves into a fight against an intricate conglomerate of forces plainly exposed the impracticality of the very foundations that the “Special Administration” is built upon—the political agreements that grant it a controlled autonomy with an expiry date.

The full ramifications of the emergence of *jianghu* in contemporary Hong Kong remain to be seen. The Hong Kong government’s hardened response to the unrest and the imposing of a new National Security Law by Beijing would have only amplified the lingering dissent. Meanwhile the movement has been brought to a halt by the global pandemic, and for now the streets of Hong Kong are muted by restrictive measures in the name of public health.

Whatever the consequences of these events will be, the emergence of *jianghu* in Hong Kong’s urban space demonstrates that a meaningful connection exists between cultural conceptions and spatial practices. This interrelation alters both the formation as well as our perception of collective life in cities and modifies the notion of what is normatively described as “public space.” Our discussion of the form and functions of shared urban spaces can be much enriched if we are able to introduce place-specific cultural conceptions and spatial practices in our understanding of different cities around the world.

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PARAMETRIC DESIGN IN THE HISTORIC URBAN DOMAIN. THE CASE OF ELEFThERIA SQUARE BY ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS

STELLA EVANGELIDOU

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary architectural practice increasingly makes use of technology for the design and creation of buildings and environments. While many architects see computer aided design as a drawing tool, others embrace parametric design ideologically, and propose it as a theory and method which can offer architectural solutions even in complex urban landscapes. Following a competition, the refurbishment of Eleftheria Square in Nicosia was awarded to the office of Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA), one of the major offices that takes parametric design ideologically. The choice of Hadid's proposal proved a major controversy among the local population from the announcement of the competition results in 2005 to the square's completion in 2020. The discussion focuses mainly on the aesthetic appropriateness of the proposal imposed on the historical context, (especially its proximity to the Venetian fortifications and the old town) despite the fact that such an urban intervention encompasses many more issues: memory and historicity, society, politics, culture, and aesthetics, as well as design methodology.

In this article, I attempt a hermeneutical approach for examining the ZHA proposal for the square, in order to see it from various perspectives and understand its significance in relation to its cultural context. I will start with examining the history of the site, offering an interpretation of the meaning it had for the local population, as a *topos* in the public realm. After investigating the main requirements of the competition, I will assess the reception of the project and the dominant arguments used in

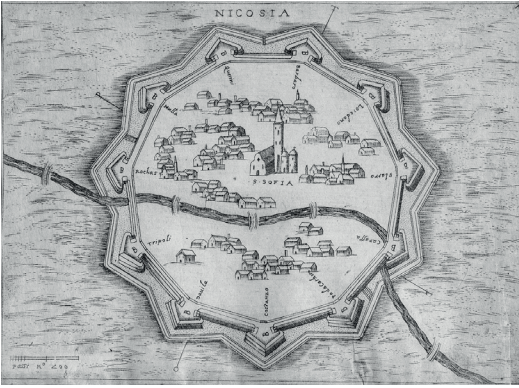


FIG.1: MAP OF NICOSIA BY GIOVANNI FRANCESCO CAMOCIO, (CA. 1570 AD)



FIG.2: GIULIO SAVORGNANO, NICOSIA FORTIFICATIONS (1567). COLONIAL OPENINGS



FIG.4: A CELEBRATION AT ELEFThERIA SQUARE (1952)

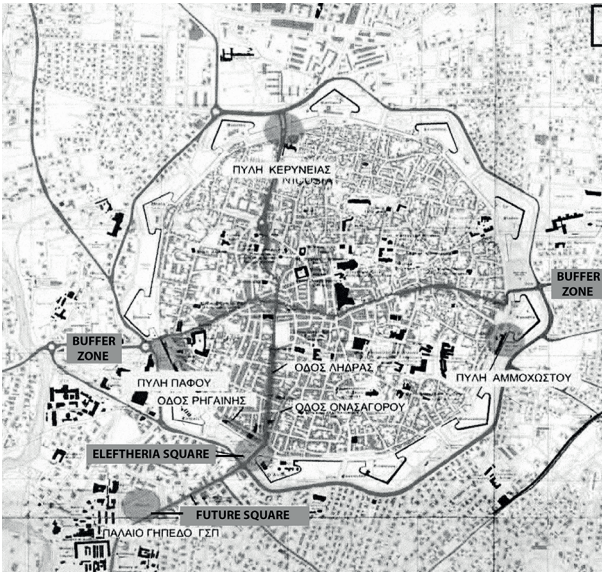


FIG.3: MAP OF NICOSIA. ELEFThERIA SQUARE, COMPETITION BRIEF (2005)

the local discussions. In an attempt to understand the architects' methodological approach, I will explain their design approach, as evident in their theoretical engagement with parametric design. To contextualize their approach, I also will investigate the opposing views of others on such practices.

Through a hermeneutical approach, and by using a theoretical discourse ranging from philosophers Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault to architectural theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez, I will relate the project to broader concerns on topics such as place and meaning, the contemporary public realm, the issue of attunement, parametric design, and the socio-political implications of a particular morphology in historical settings. I also will explore how the project, as it has been built, is used by residents of and tourists visiting Nicosia. It raises questions about architecture's ethical role and impact on society in the era of globalization. Through this examination, the Eleftheria Square project in Nicosia can be seen as a case study in the promise and pitfalls of employing parametric design in the historic urban domain.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND—THE SITE AS TOPOS

Even though Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has never been designed as an Ideal City, [fig.1] its fortifications were a model of Renaissance engineering meant to be improved upon and replicated in ideal cities elsewhere within the Republic of Venice. Designed by the military engineer Giulio Savorgnano in 1567, the walls were still incomplete three years later when the town was besieged by the Ottomans. Yet they still remain largely intact to this day. When the old town started expanding beyond its limits in the late-nineteenth century, the British colonial government created openings [fig.2] through the Venetian walls in the form of bridges or roads, in order to connect it with the new suburbs. Two of these openings were wider than the others. Even though they were bridges over

a moat, they functioned as collective spaces. One acquired the function of a bus terminal, whereas the other functioned as a gathering space in the form of a square. This certainly occurred due to its location: it is an extension of the historical commercial main street, connected to a long avenue that leads out of the city. The square moreover is adjacent to the bastion where until recently the City Hall was located.

As a result of political hostilities between Turks and Greeks on the island, a buffer zone has been erected, first in 1963 and then in 1974, that divides Nicosia into northern and southern parts. Thus, while the historical city center, with its gothic cathedral and piazza, remained within the limits of the Turkish occupied territory in the north, the square was appropriated by the Greek citizens as the city's main square in the south. [fig.3] As such, it developed strong socio-political qualities, and became a place where spontaneous demonstrations and celebrations would take place. The bastion, being at a higher level, acted many times as a stage enabling direct contact between the organizers or politicians above and the people in the square below. [fig.4] Occasionally, the municipality would organize festivals, during which this urban setting would function as an open-air concert hall.

Associated with such communal events, the square was then renamed "Eleftheria", which is the Greek word for freedom.¹ It has been, therefore, a *topos* in both a phenomenological as well as in a political sense. It was a *topos* in the phenomenological sense of the *Genius Loci*, as defined by Christian Norberg-Schulz: a place which can be determined by its physical characteristics, and yet is more than that. A *topos* is defined as an existential space that carries intangible qualities which can only be experienced, rather than be determined by geometry and matter. In the case of man-made places, the qualities of a *topos* encompass the way a group of people draws on both its own virtues and the virtues of the space in which it is settled, thus acting and developing a degree of collective consciousness. Places where people have such a relationship with their built environment conjure up a sense of belonging. Consequently, such a place holds both the life of the people and the aura of the several historical layers, which reflect its special character and its own distinct spirit, its *Genius Loci*.² Since their construction, the Nicosia city walls have endured Venetian domination, Ottoman and British rule, the country's independence, and the Turkish invasion, but also the spirit of the people in social struggle and rejoicing.

In addition to its metaphysical qualities, the socio-political activities that took place on the square gave it qualities that defined it as a *topos politikos*. According to Hannah Arendt, the life of the polis is possible through such activities of common action (*praxis*) in the public realm,

which is the common world that gathers us together. Arendt relates public space to the space of appearances, that is, face-to-face human interactions. Appearance is a revelation of oneself, of one's position and essence, to others. However, as Seyla Benhabib explains, the public realm is a place where self-interest is transformed into a common public goal that transcends the boundaries of face-to-face society.³ It is the presence of others, that see and hear from different positions), and demanding something in common with others to be more permanent than our earthly lives, which assures us of the reality of both the world and ourselves. Our perception of reality, Arendt argues, depends upon the phenomenality which takes place in the public realm. Consequently, our sense of our own existence depends on it.

The public realm is thus a political place where the life of praxis (*vita activa*) becomes a political life (*vios politikos*). Arendt considers *praxis* as the highest and most important level of active life. As a political action, *praxis* is the true realization of human freedom. *Topos politikos* transcends the lifespan of one generation, and thus transforms itself into a place of potential earthly immortality.⁴ Eleftheria Square has been the public realm of the *polis* where its citizens, for generations, would gather in order to participate in a democratic expression of their collective concerns. It was, in this way, an intersubjective space which bonded, but also differentiated, the members of the society in the democratic manifestation in the *polis*. It was through actions marked by their essence of democracy and plurality that the *topos* gained, in turn, its existential quality.

“THE PUBLIC REALM IS A PLACE WHERE SELF-INTEREST IS TRANSFORMED INTO A COMMON PUBLIC GOAL THAT TRANSCENDS THE BOUNDARIES OF FACE-TO-FACE SOCIETY”

THE COMPETITION FOR A NEW CITY SQUARE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE WINNING SCHEME

In 2005, the Nicosia municipality announced a competition for a new “bridge-square.” The main challenges of the requirements, as given in the



FIG.5: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFThERIA SQUARE AND MOAT PARK, NICOSIA (2010-21)

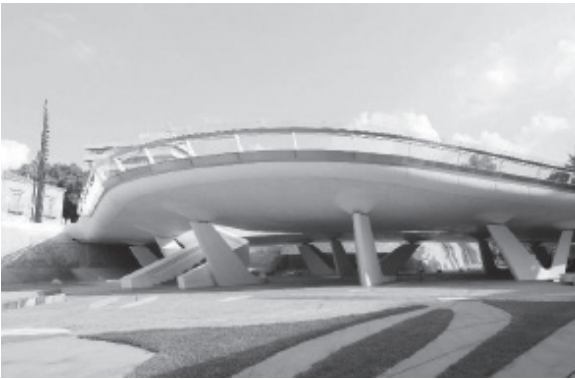


FIG.6: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFThERIA SQUARE AND MOAT PARK, NICOSIA (2010-21). THE 'DISH.' VIEW FROM THE MOAT

competition brief, were: i) to respect the monument of the Venetian walls, by following the international conventions and the local legislation on antiquities; ii) to design a permanent, two-lane bridge for vehicular traffic; iii) to provide a public space that would allow social interaction during all seasonal climatic conditions; iv) to pay attention to the materials and details, to propose street furniture as well as new programmatic uses; v) the proposed construction and materials had to allow reversibility, since only the bridge for vehicles would be permanent, whereas part of the square was to be demolished in the future after the construction of a new public square, in a new refurbished area outside the walls. [fig.3] As stated before, the competition was won by Zaha Hadid Architects, with a proposal which caused intense controversy between the citizens during and after the realization of the project. [fig.5.] According to the description of the office's website, the design of Eleftheria Square represents a "historically significant architectural intervention" which aspires to reconnect the old

fortified town with the modern city, by means of a “bold vision of coherence and continuity.” The level of the square, which the architects call “the dish,” has a slight upward inclination toward the moat, so as to act as an amphitheater addressing the bastion [fig.6], and in order to create a dialogue between the old and the new, as the office’s representative explained in an interview.⁵

According to the same representative, the main structural novelty that was to be introduced was the unorthodox shape of the columns resting on the moat, with a thin tip and opening to a wide diameter at the top. This design was a solution to the problem of excavating into the moat and disturbing the historical layers beneath. He added that the innovative design and construction technique at such a scale was possible only due to parametric design, the method first applied in the Phaeno Science Centre, which ZHA had just completed in Germany. Apart from the information shared above, there is no other information recorded regarding the architects’ concept and intentions for the form chosen for the specific project and its integration with the existing urban fabric. The Eleftheria Square project was nominated by a local jury for the Mies van der Rohe Awards which, as an institution, demands architecture to respond to vernacular, traditional, cultural, and natural elements. The views of the supporters of the project, engaged in the local debate, is well summarized in the jury’s accompanying supportive essay from the local committee, which interprets the upward lifting of “the dish” as a symbolic gesture toward the future, and its circular geometry, which embraces the bastion, as a reference to the past. The essay regards the lower level of the moat as “a secret garden” with its own microclimate and distinct spatial qualities. The jury further praised the aesthetic quality of the details and the secret garden, which give to the overall project an artistic value which is accompanied with spatial experiences and promenades. In such a way,



FIG.7: MATERIALITY AND SCALE
IN THE OLD TOWN: NICOSIA
WITHIN THE VENETIAN WALLS.



FIG.8: MATERIALITY AND SCALE
IN THE OLD TOWN: NICOSIA
WITHIN THE VENETIAN WALLS.

it concludes, the project not only “re-establishes the area as a gateway to the old city, but also as a unique destination in itself.”⁶

On the other side, the opponents of the project criticize the Hadid scheme firstly for the way it visually clashes with the monument of the Venetian walls “through its scale and materials.” They claim that the Venetian walls function at the level of the intimate and the familiar, despite their monumentality, because of the earthy quality of the sandstone, which is also used extensively in the buildings of the old city with the narrow streets. [fig.7-8] The color and texture of the sandstone is in contrast to the coldness of the marble and the gray and white concrete of the new square. [fig.9] They perceive the new square as massive and monolithic, whereas the Venetian walls and the old town consist of small units and intimate spaces that relate to the human scale.⁷ The materials used for Hadid’s square, in conjunction with the hyper-aestheticized forms and sophisticated details, have been considered as alien to the locals’ sense of aesthetics and habits.

The lack of consideration for the local climatic conditions is another issue. Cyprus is sunny most of the year, whereas Nicosia, being at the center of the island, is exposed to high temperatures that, in the summer, can sometimes exceed 40°C. Indifference to the microclimate of Nicosia prohibits people from gathering in the square for at least half the year. The unsuitability of the public square to the weather conditions limits public encounters due to the reflective materials and lack of shade. In addition, this criticism focuses on the fact that the proposed scheme failed to respond to the basic programmatic requirements of the competition, since the construction materials didn’t seem to be reversible, there was no

vehicular bridge, and no furnishings were proposed, while compliance with the Antiquities Law was disputed. It is also important to note that the design at the moat level was not part of the competition, but a later commission added to the project.

Although the square garnered praise for its formal qualities, the negative criticism weighs more on its human utility. The anthropocentric concern examines the metaphysical quality of the character and sense of the place, as well as the relation between its social and urban aspects, on the phenomenological dimension. From this short analysis of the scheme, one can conclude that issues such as materiality, historical layering, climate, local habits, and ways of socializing and using public space were given little consideration during the design of the new Eleftheria square by the winning office. The debate, which took place in the local press and across social media, was often accompanied with both caustic and ironic remarks directed toward the architect and the mayor, who were seen as indifferent elites, distant from the operation of the “real world.” Such criticism was related to the extensive time required for the project to be completed, due to the many delays caused by conflicts between the architect, the municipality, and the contractors, which, in turn, caused an increase in cost and the disruption of the city center.

RELATED THEORETICAL DISCOURSES

In the absence of more information from ZHA regarding the concept behind Eleftheria Square, examination of the theoretical discourse which constitutes the background of their work is our only option for understanding the designers’ thought process. Concurrently, an examination of other theoretical discourses concerning new architecture in historic and sensitive environments can inform a critical perspective on the subject.

The reference to, and influence of, the Russian avant-garde on Zaha Hadid’s work since her



FIG.9: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS,
ELEFThERIA SQUARE, THE
LEVEL OF THE SQUARE.

student years has been discussed and analyzed by many theorists and critics. Reflecting on her early paintings, Hadid confirmed her interest in the concept of fragmentation, abstraction, and explosion, as well as in deconstructing ideas of repetitiveness and mass production, which constitute the characteristics of modern architecture. According to ZHA's website, "for Hadid, painting was a design tool, and abstraction was an investigative structure for imagining architecture and its relationships to the world we live in." "Her paintings," it continues, "were conceived as a manifesto of a utopian world," and "prefigure the potential of digital processes," which explains why "technology and innovation have always been central to the work of the office".⁸

Her collaboration with Patrik Schumacher in 1988, whose work in parametric design complemented Hadid's approach, enabled the realization of their stylistic projects, and achieved both technological and structural breakthroughs. Schumacher's perspective, as explained in his massive theoretical books *Parametricism as Style—Parametricism Manifesto* 2008⁹ and *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*,¹⁰ offer insight into the ZHA approach to architecture. In both works, Schumacher claims that today's architecture has difficulty addressing the complexity of contemporary cities and societies, and therefore needs to reassert its methods. He sees an "inability in modernism and deconstructivism to form a new sustainable view." Therefore, he highlights the need to discover a new comprehensive theoretical system which can describe architecture from within its own internal constitution.¹¹

Since architecture, according to Schumacher, cannot exist without theory, all buildings before Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), the first architect offering a theory of architecture, fall into the category of tradition. Schumacher asserts that each previous style in history constitutes a new research paradigm defeating its predecessor. Therefore, the "history of

architecture can be thought of in terms of cycles of innovation and shifts between revolutionary periods.”¹² Parametricism is thus, according to him, the style of our times, because it is considered the architectural avant-garde of the technological era and, in addition, it can explain architecture itself as a distinct, autonomous network of communications. The “autopoiesis” of architecture is architecture’s ability for self-production. This is based on a theory that focuses on architectural communication that observes and analyzes how individual communications depend upon, and reproduce structures such as concepts, values, styles and methods. Communications are the drawings, texts, and built works, whereas built works are the set of reference points within the network of architectural communications.

Conceived as a scientific theory about architecture from “within architecture,” it is promoted as the “end of architectural theories.” Reflecting architecture’s evolving patterns of communication in relation to the societal domain, the autopoiesis of architecture and parametricism do not communicate with straight lines and platonic solids as they did in the past, nor with typologies, zones, or territories. Instead, the theory involves working with primitives such as “splines, blobs, nurds, and particles” organized by scripts, as well as by “gradient fields of activity and variable social scenarios calibrated with various event parameters.” Since architectural elements have become so malleable through parametricism, one can ask for further softening, further differentiation, correlation, script, and so on.¹³ In this method, there is a cross-connectedness which, unlike phenomenology, always depends on computer data.

Schumacher suggests that “parametricism” could introduce new ideas to the architectural scene. To him, it “can be summarized in the slogan” of importing an “architectural and urban repertoire that is geared up to create complex, polycentric

“SCHUMACHER CLAIMS THAT TODAY’S ARCHITECTURE HAS DIFFICULTY ADDRESSING THE COMPLEXITY OF CONTEMPORARY CITIES AND SOCIETIES, AND THEREFORE NEEDS TO REASSERT ITS METHODS.”

urban and architectural fields which are densely layered and continuously differentiated.” Style, buildings, and cities are described in terms of liquidity, flow, void, openness, and complexity, and their compliance to the tools of parametric design.¹⁴ The images in the *Parametricism Manifesto* are related to Hadid’s utopian painting, *London 2066* and many others.¹⁵ The “active shake” of the city occurs by using similar parameters to large scale projects where open spaces, streets, railway lines, and water networks are redefined in new relationships and new possibilities in urban experiments.

The theoretical ground expressed in Hadid’s paintings and Schumacher’s manifesto share similar and intense formalistic elements and fluidity with ZHA’s architectural projects built all over the world. Despite the location or country in which they are built, these projects look alike, having similar forms and even photorealistic renderings from the conceptual to the final construction stage. At the same time, the language and notions Schumacher uses to describe this methodology are hardly intelligible for people unfamiliar with the technological aspect of digital design. Nevertheless, these notions are expected to be understood, at least by the younger generations, since this method is well established in the educational program of architecture schools. Nonetheless, this language is far removed from any previous form of architectural production and representation, which remains haptic; it might instead sound more like a technical description of the inside functioning of a machine, rather than one regarding the “insides of architecture,” as Schumacher claims.

At the opposite end of the argument about the place of science and technology in human life, many twentieth-century theorists have spoken of its negative course, beginning with the shift in consciousness that occurred after Descartes and Galileo. Amongst them, the architectural theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez further explains the shift that occurred in the architectural field. In his latest work, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science*, he argues that *topos*, as a qualitative experiential site, was substituted by geometric space, since Galileo and Descartes saw the universe as a homogeneous geometric void in which all bodies were described by the same mathematical laws. It was under the influence of such epistemological thinking that Claude Perrault (1613-1688) came to understand architectural representation as a systematized set of sections, along with Cartesian planes.¹⁶ A century later, according to Pérez-Gómez, Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand (1760–1834) believed that architectural meaning was dependent only on the efficient, mechanical understanding of structure and cost-effective use of materials. For him, architecture was essentially a social need for a functional shelter. Durand implemented sophisticated tools of representation for producing

innovative work that was unresponsive to its cultural context. He preferred strictly instrumental design mechanisms, with the belief that architecture is the objective space of Cartesian geometry. Thus, a “building” meant its use, and any emotion was beyond its scope. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was a common assumption among architects that architectural space could be easily represented through descriptive geometry and axonometric projection based on visual attributes. This, Pérez-Gómez argues, neglected the emotional aspects and qualities experienced in a real, physical, and transcendental space.¹⁷

This translates, today, to the production of digital space and fashionable innovations through architectural software. Pérez-Gómez, therefore, is surprised by neither Schumacher’s ideas presented in *Autopoiesis* nor the popular desire for “intelligent” buildings with “computerized minds” for adjusting to our comfort. He claims that as long as the use of technology enhances telecommunication devices and production techniques, our own sensory and perceptual abilities will be diminished. And since our urban environments emerge from this method of production, which reduces space to a set of coordinates, they remain devoid of qualities which involve all our senses. For Pérez-Gómez, the crisis of modern science and architecture consists of the fact that parametric strategies and tools generate forms and novel buildings that fail to propose meaningful, attuned environments for human culture. In this way they “exacerbate our sense of despair in view of the meaninglessness of existence.”¹⁸

Further, such novel structures are in line with strategies for the commodification of architecture within the contemporary neoliberal political spectrum. The art critic Hal Foster offers an explanation of the process, which is aided by high-tech materials and electronic manipulations in order to become signs and symbols. He claims that the structure and the program are distorted in a way

“FOR PÉREZ-GÓMEZ, THE CRISIS OF MODERN SCIENCE AND ARCHITECTURE “EXACERBATE OUR SENSE OF DESPAIR IN VIEW OF THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF EXISTENCE.”

to achieve a sculptural monumental effect which, at times, has a scale that dominates the landscape. Formal expression is stressed, above all, in order to impress, while behind the rhetorical façades there are, many times, conventional interiors. Thus, the form of the building serves as “a sign that overwhelms the context.” According to Foster, this is a winning populist formula with the signature of a star-architect, which serves the marketing policies of “museums, companies, cities, and other corporate entities that want to be perceived, through instant icons, as global players.”¹⁹

Eleftheria Square fulfills Foster’s description. Moreover, since the mayors and municipality officials have used the name of the architect and the design as a branding tool to promote the square as a tourist attraction, in order to raise the city’s economy and status. The language of the project coincides with that of city branding policies which turn a location into a destination, while at the same time rejecting its own historicity and the meaning of the place. *Topos*, in this case, becomes spectacle. In such a way, architecture turns into an image that serves more the market economy than society.

Architecture as a language and art form is symbolic, and whether it has a meaningful presence for its users or not, it has its own meaning within the urban context. From the point of view of philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutics, new architecture in a historic setting can generate multiple interpretations, which are constantly regulated by what a setting has been in the past, and what it wants to be, by means of the architecture of the new intervention. These interpretations might fall into the realm of prejudices. Prejudices for Gadamer are the pre-conditions of understanding. In the case of new architecture in old settings, we distinguish blind prejudices from productive prejudices only through a dialogical encounter with the past as a whole. Life, says Gadamer, is the dialogue between past and present. It is through this dialogue that we can define our living values and give meaning to our lives and surroundings.²⁰

To understand the past is a necessary metaphysical basis for life. The context for the new architecture relates to people’s understanding of their setting. Yet the relation to the architecture of the past goes beyond the historical period of which people have knowledge.²¹ Gadamer talks about the harmony of all details, with the whole as a criterion for this understanding. Failure to achieve harmony means that the understanding has failed. How do we, then, understand the past? For Gadamer, it is a process of holistic experiences. Understanding tradition is an essential element to understanding existence. This understanding also takes place on visual and tangible grounds, such as materials, construction techniques, texture, colors, spatial disposition, and volumetric articulation.²² In such

a way, Gadamer offers an analysis of the tangible qualities of the *Genius Loci*.

From a similar perspective, Pérez-Gómez discusses how, for centuries, the European city functioned as a theater of complex and diverse atmospheres. He explains “atmospheres” as the character, mood, and ambience of a place apprehended by all the senses. Atmospheres result from both natural and manmade spaces. Besides their materials and details, they include smells, sounds, and habits. These constitute an aesthetic experience which is multisensory and emotional, and cannot be reduced to distant “pictorial” forms. If architecture, he claims, does not aim to deal with local cultures, the lives of people, their habits, places, stories, and history, it will remain detached and contextually alien.²³

With the term *attunement*, Pérez-Gómez calls for an architecture that is attuned to its location and its inhabitants, and can thus enhance our human values and capacities. Architecture remains in crisis, he states, as long as its social relevance is lost to formal innovation and algorithmic parameters that determine the physical environment, while ignoring the meaning of places. The meaning of places rests in the poetics of materials and cultural values. He argues that the understanding of its meaning is possible when architecture is engaged in a dialogical process between present and past, when it operates as a communicative setting for societies. By understanding its meaning, which is a constituent part of our consciousness, we are engaged with the spiritual dimension of life and a process of self-understanding. Pérez-Gómez delves into an existential reflection on the meaning of life, which is inextricably linked to the meaning of architecture. He thus poses a question for the ethical dimension of architecture and its service to society. To be fully self-aware, he claims, participation in an external environment replete with meanings and emotions is necessary. Such transformative atmospheres bring

“TO UNDERSTAND
THE PAST IS A
NECESSARY
METAPHYSICAL
BASIS FOR LIFE”



FIG.10: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS,
ELEFThERIA SQUARE. OCCASIONAL
CONCERTS UNDER THE SQUARE



FIG.11: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS,
ELEFThERIA SQUARE. LATE AFTER-
NOON (2022)



FIG.12: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS,
ELEFThERIA SQUARE. MOAT LEVEL,
WEEKENDS IN LATE AFTERNOON
(2022)

productive change. Attuned architecture permits people to be attuned to their worldly actions and habits.²⁴

THE "ACTUAL WORLD" - THE CURRENT USE OF THE SQUARE

If we consider Gadamer's and Pérez-Gómez's hermeneutical approach valid, it is obvious that the parametric methodology used for Eleftheria Square did not make sufficient consideration for either history, meaning or attunement. However, an integrated view of the Eleftheria Square project

is not possible without considering the way it is now being used, including its complementary part on the adjacent moat level. A few months after its completion, the first event organized on the square celebrated a political anniversary. This was the first and last collective event of any character to take place on the square, according to the municipality's records. After that, the municipality moved all events below the square, on the moat level. Since then, on the lower level underneath the square there have been many events of various, other than political, character. [fig.10] Some uses that were overlooked by ZHA in its design, but deemed by the city council appropriate for the moat park, were designed by the municipality, such as a small amphitheater and a playground, which appropriated some edges of the park.

The level of the square functions, mainly, as a pedestrian passage-way between the new and the old walled city. During the day, it is usually deserted, especially due to the intense sunshine, [fig.9] but also because it provides no other uses. On weekend nights and afternoons, however, the square attracts many people from the migrant (Asian and African) community working in Nicosia. [fig.11] The same occurs during weekends, at the level of the moat, which is overrun by migrants taking selfies. [fig.12] These are, perhaps, the most vibrant moments of the square and the moat park, since the locals, who don't hang out on the square, usually leave immediately after visiting for an event at the moat-park. Besides the locals who visited the site when it opened, and despite the attractive drone photos advertising the site taken by the municipality, [fig.5] it seems that it is not a destination for them. Likewise at the moat level, although there is an attractive park with fountains, lawns and tree clumps, located on floral-pattern concrete paving—all shapes ordered by parametric design.

These observations lead to the question of why the site cannot become a pluralistic collective

space of exchange and meaning for all. Would it be valid to suggest that this might be due to its strong character of a pleasure garden that caters only to visual pleasure, in conjunction with the diminishing importance of the Venetian walls as a mute backdrop to the irrelevant scenery in front of it? The deserted appearance of the square during the day turns it into a dystopia, whereas the project's site as a whole can be defined as a heterotopia. Michel Foucault, in his work *Of Other Spaces*, defines a utopia to be an ideal place of a perfect yet unreal society in bliss and describes heterotopias as the real places that have strayed from what is considered "normal" and are approaching the "other."²⁵ Both the square and the moat below fit Foucault's description of heterotopias of the transitory, as well as of the two extreme types of heterotopia, of illusion and compensation, respectively. A heterotopia of the transitory is a place absolutely temporal, disoriented from the eternal, and where time is fleeting, like in a festival. In a heterotopia of illusion we encounter informal, outside of "the normal" social activities in an illusory space which exposes the rationality of the adjacent space. A heterotopia of compensation, according to Foucault's terminology, fits his example of the "colonies:" a perfectly organized space that leaves its mark in the culture, which aims to be an ideal model of organization to which we all must adapt.²⁶

CONCLUSION

Eleftheria Square, as an integral part of the Venetian walls, connecting the old city with the new, the city's history and its memory, carried a profound meaning for the inhabitants of Nicosia that can be understood and defined by the notion of *topos*. The discussion and controversy regarding the refurbished Eleftheria Square will, perhaps, continue for many years, given its importance to the city. This is so because of its central location as well as its historicity, its continuous cost of maintenance and surveillance, and its function as a public domain in flux in an emerging multicultural city. Besides its specificity, the project can be seen as a case study for new projects in historic urban environments designed via a similar parametric approach.

Reviewing the examination of the project, one could say that several considerations arise regarding the role of architecture in society. On the one hand, there are issues regarding the more technical aspect of the production of architecture and its management. On the other, there are issues related to its humanitarian and spiritual roles. In both cases, the core issue is ethical, and concerns those to whom architecture bears responsibility. Issues related to the responsibility of the competition jury to meet the programmatic requirements, the responsibility of municipal

authorities when the initial budget is exceeded, the management of the schedule, the management of taxpayers' money, the extension of the project's scale without a new tender, and the failure to comply with conventions on antiquities, are related to the technocratic aspect, but are not insignificant in the world of architectural practice. On the contrary, they are related to the ethical code of the discipline. Even though these issues are not usually heard beyond local societies, in our time of globalized architecture it is worth studying projects of star-architecture and how and/or why their execution might affect the wellbeing of a society.

Although the technical aspect is short-term and can, eventually, be handled, the actual built projects and their consequences are long-term. The result of a theoretical and methodological attempt based on "parametricism" for a utopian landscape that would be "self-produced" and can reproduce communication structures, such as concepts and values, seems to become, in the Eleftheria Square project, a place that segregates society. The public realm, according to Arendt's definition, does not emerge automatically because people gather. Instead, it occurs when their opinions are openly expressed, and their collective goal is manifested through actions that are possible due to human diversity and agency.²⁷ The hyper-aestheticized and non-functional forms have displaced political actions from the site. Eleftheria Square has lost its quality as a *topos politikos*. Despite the promise of the inclusion of human functions into parametric design, it seems that algorithms on a computer screen cannot, at least yet, engage peoples' histories, their sites with multiple meanings, their memories, or social habits. Instead, while aligned with the demands of a marketplace that commodifies architecture, "parametricism" results in an aesthetic homogenization on its top side, while it is only underneath and around its margins that the creation of heterotopias such as those at Eleftheria Square;

“THE PUBLIC REALM DOES NOT EMERGE AUTOMATICALLY BECAUSE PEOPLE GATHER. INSTEAD, IT OCCURS WHEN THEIR OPINIONS ARE OPENLY EXPRESSED AND THEIR COLLECTIVE GOAL IS MANIFESTED THROUGH ACTIONS THAT ARE POSSIBLE DUE TO HUMAN DIVERSITY AND AGENCY.”

heterotopias of the transitory, of illusion, and of compensation.

If we consider that human consciousness needs external environments as vessels for meaning and emotion for its self-awareness, as well as dialogue and exchange in a pluralistic environment, these spaces of aesthetic homogenization cannot offer the space for a conscious life on the spiritual, social, and political level. Since the political is closely associated with aesthetic experience, and since at the core of the aesthetic experience is life itself, our harmony with our surroundings is an important factor in our psychosomatic health. As Pérez-Gómez says, an ethical architecture cannot but promote such attunement with our physical places, which are of utmost importance for our well-being. Cities with alienating environments cause alienation with culture and result in a sense of purposelessness. They are sources of malaise, contributing to despair. For when architecture functions as a “high-tech drug,” says Pérez-Gómez, it simply provides comfort in order to avoid boredom and the reality of death.²⁸ If architecture will continue to eliminate spaces that promote human exchange and awareness by replacing them with “intelligent” and “spectacular” places that promote lethargy, narcissism, and illusion, we will probably need to reconsider its role in, and responsibility for, the survival of culture.

ENDNOTES

1. After the Second World War, and prior to the name “Eleftheria” (Freedom), the square was named after Ioannis Metaxas. He was the Greek prime minister who rejected an ultimatum to surrender imposed by Italy, committing Greece to the Allies and bringing the country into the war against the Nazis and Mussolini. Thus, the square was for many decades associated with the “No” of the Greek resistance and passion for freedom.
2. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 6–22.
3. Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 200–201.
4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Second Edition) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 7, 15, 50–72.
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WHAT ARCHITECTURE DOES. AN EMBODIED APPROACH TOWARDS THE IMPACT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

MARGIT VAN SCHAİK

The user's space is lived—not represented (or conceived). [Henri Lefebvre]¹

INTRODUCTION

A recurring theme in the history of architectural and urban theory is the shaping role the built environment plays in the everyday lives of its users. Perhaps most famously illustrated by Winston Churchill's statement "We shape our buildings, and afterwards they shape us," both theorists as well as designers have frequently considered the designed environment as playing an active part in society and examined the relation between plans on the drawing table and their impact on people's lives in reality.² Although divergent in their outcomes, the ambitions of modernists like Le Corbusier, structuralists like Herman Hertzberger, and current architects who advocate the participation of end-users in their design processes converge in the belief that design can contribute to the production of a certain ideal society.

These same ambitions, however, have also led to projects in which people behaved differently or even completely opposite to the intentions of the designers. The efficiency and functionality that were at the basis of early twentieth century modernism were later part of the criticism on the living-conditions in buildings like Pruitt-Igoe in Saint-Louis or the Bijlmer-neighbourhood in Amsterdam.³ Alison Smithson expressed her disillusionment about the way residents behaved in Robin Hood gardens after she and her husband had designed it completely around their vision on an ideal collective society.⁴ In less extreme cases as well,

it seems the impact of the built environment is limited. Hope for creating an ideal social situation, such as strong communities shaped by collective spaces or gardens, often seems vain in retrospect and serve primarily as a good story to “sell” the design rather than a proper solution in reality. Luckily, the same principle applies vice-versa: even in poorly designed buildings, people seem to be quite flexible in making their environments work for whatever it is they want to do.

This observation has led some to observe, that the built environment is not as influential as designers themselves might like to think. According to architect and behavioural researcher Richard Buday for example, “environmental determinism’s failure showed leading architecture ... does not shape behaviour any better than secondary architecture,” and therefore one might even wonder if the architect’s profession is at all that relevant.⁵ The belief in this power of the built environment can even be dangerous according to Buday, as it neglects to acknowledge the impact of people’s own choices.

Regardless of how much or how little impact design has on people, we can nevertheless agree that one environment can be experienced as more pleasant, lively, beautiful or practical than another, even when such judgements might not be universal. *Underestimating* such impact might be just as dangerous as *overestimating* its power. Instead of trying to measure the share that can be ascribed to environmental design, this article therefore proposes an alternative route: instead of asking the quantitative question of how much impact the environment has on its users, it asks the generative question of how such impact arises. The first part of the article explores possible answers to this question. The second discusses issues that complicate the implementation of this knowledge into the design practice.

The theories of such philosophers as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the wake of recent developments in the fields of philosophy, psychology and neuroscience, and more specifically the research program of embodied embedded cognition, provide insights into the strong and dependent relations between the mind, the body and the environment.⁶ Supported by extensive scientific research over the last few decades, these insights dismiss a Cartesian view in which an immaterial and independent mind can think rationally about the physical world.⁷

As many architectural theorists, such as Harry Mallgrave, have shown, these insights offer strong potential for understanding architectural experience as well.⁸ Instead of considering subjects as relatively independent from the built environment they perceive, we can now understand how architectural experience is a physical consequence of the impact a building has on its users. To make this assertion clear, we will have a look at what is

called the enactive approach to perception, a theory that is part of the broader embodied embedded cognition movement. As Andrea Jelić, et al. have argued, this enactive view provides a particularly useful guide to studying architectural experience.⁹ Of particular interest is a paper by Evan Thompson and Francisco Varela, in which the connections between mind, body and world are explained as three “dimensions of embodiment,” or three different cycles of operation that integrate these three components:

1. Cycles of organismic regulation of the entire body.
2. Cycles of sensorimotor coupling between organism and environment.
3. Cycles of intersubjective interaction, involving the recognition of the intentional meaning of actions and linguistic communication.¹⁰

Although it falls beyond the scope of this article to describe these kinds of cycles in all their biological detail, they do provide an interesting framework with which we can explore the ways in which architecture influences its users. They describe the three levels at which body, brain and world are integrated with each other and therefore how connections between them are made, which provides an overview of how architecture has “access” to a human being.

In the latter part of the article, I will therefore consider each dimension separately and explore how it relates to the built environment to arrive at a tool with which the impact in specific cases can be analyzed. Besides this theoretical exploration, a specific case-study will be used in order to illustrate the theory and relate it to building practice. The chosen case-study is the plenary meeting hall of the Dutch Parliament, a design that holds a special relation to themes of publicity and power. Seating the 150 elected members of Parliament, it forms the physical realization of Dutch democracy and despite being an indoor space, the hall is arguably

one of the most public spaces in the country. In the first instance, both literally and physically public access to meetings in the hall is ensured at all times, overcoming complex issues such as security and wheelchair access. But access is ensured virtually as well, as the debates taking place in the room are shared through various media on a daily basis. Programmatically similar to the British House of Commons Chamber Churchill referred to in his famous statement, the impact of the hall's design is particularly relevant, since it may possibly influence policies that concern the entire country. It results in interesting relationships between the roles that are accommodated and how they have become physical in the design of the space, the furniture and other facilities. Drawings of this design will provide an illustration of the impact that can be discovered in each cycle.

ORGANISMIC REGULATION

Under organismic regulation we understand those unconscious processes that regulate the state of the organism. As Thompson and Varela explain, the “main basis is the autonomic nervous system, in which sensors and effectors to and from the body link neural processes to basic homeodynamic processes of the internal organs and viscera.”¹¹ The purpose of these cycles is to translate information about the environment to reactions within the body in order to keep the organism safe and healthy. Often, they remain unnoticed, as they occur unconsciously and more instinctively than intentional perception and action.

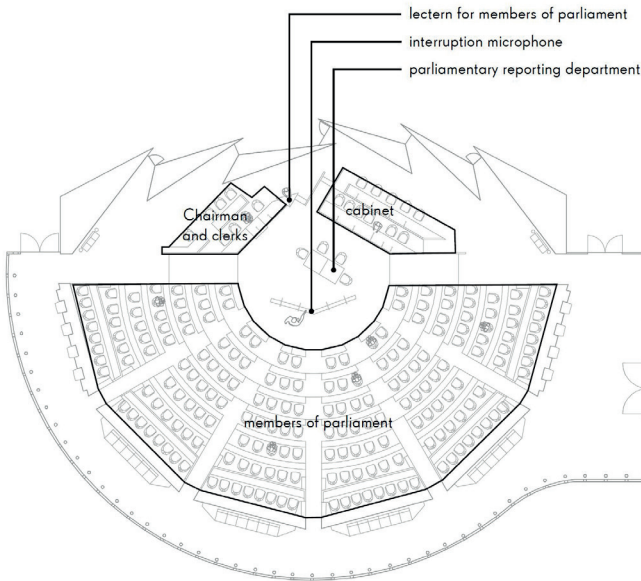


FIG.1: PI DE BRUIJN/
ARCHITECTENCIE,
ASSEMBLY HALL OF
THE DUTCH PARLIA-
MENT, THE HAGUE
1992, AN OVERVIEW
OF THE ROLES IN THE
PLENARY HALL AND
THEIR POSITION

Emotional states are the outcome of an interaction between, for instance, the central nervous system and visceromotor systems that regulate the organs. These emotional states can be understood as a first “gut feeling” about what is experienced. As Thompson and Varela explain “organismic regulation, because of its links with basic emotional operating systems ... has a pervasive affective dimension that manifests in the range of affective behaviours and feelings.”¹² In other words, when we experience architecture, organismic regulation controls our first reaction to a building.¹³

The autonomic nervous system, which is divided into the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, responds to these emotional states.¹⁴ The sympathetic nervous system has an activating role, as it accelerates the heart rate in response to certain circumstances. Therewith it regulates our “fight-or-flight” response, as it can prepare the body for intense physical activity. The parasympathetic nervous system, however, calms the body. When circumstances suggest that the organism is safe, this system brings it to a state in which it can rest.

Here, we can draw a parallel to what Edmund Burke has called the Sublime and Beautiful as categories of aesthetic enjoyment.¹⁵ The former is based on a tensioning of the body, when for example we stand on the edge of a cliff, the latter is based on a relaxation when we observe something serene and controlled. From this we can understand organismic regulation as the process that on the one hand makes us say “wow” when for example observing imposing or monumental architecture, and on the other makes us feel comfortable when a space is small and shielded.¹⁶

This observation becomes more concrete when we consider the design of the Dutch plenary meeting hall. The hall is part of a building designed by Pi de Bruijn and realized in 1992, located at the Binnenhof in The Hague. It holds the plenary meetings of the parliament or the “Tweede Kamer”

“THESE
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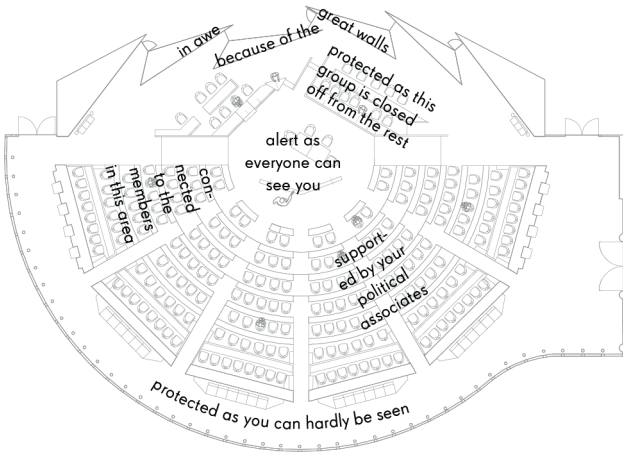
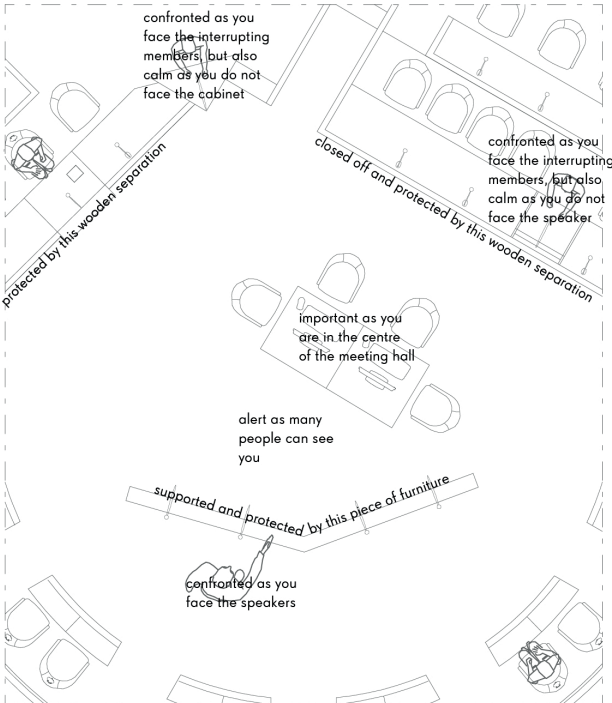


FIG.2: POSSIBLE EMOTIONAL STATES EVOKED BY THE GENERAL LAYOUT OF THE PLENARY MEETING HALL

FIG.3: POSSIBLE EMOTIONAL STATES EVOKED IN THE CENTER OF THE HALL



(second chamber), which has a comparable role to the House of Representatives in the U.S. or the House of Commons in Great Britain. The 150 members of parliament are seated in six segments, facing their Chair(wo)man and clerks on one side and the government (cabinet) on the other. [Fig. 1]

When entering, walking through and resting in the arena-scaled hall, different emotional states will probably arise, related to different parts of the space. [Fig. 2-6] In the centre of the hall for example, one is in the middle of a large space, with a high ceiling in which all other users of the room are facing you due to the orientation of their seats. These elements seem intended to evoke a reaction of alertness. In contrast, in the small hallway below the public stands, users are mostly shielded from the large room, because the lower ceiling provides a space that feels much more soothing. It is no coincidence that most actual compromises are made here, where politicians that might be enemies in the “arena,” can feel at ease and come together.¹⁷

When you are in the centre of the hall users face a collection of large natural stone walls that rise from behind the Chair(wo)man to which comments are addressed. These solid walls might very well evoke a sense of awe and are clearly meant to impress via their monumentality. At the same time the furnishings of the meeting hall are designed in such a way that people are often shielded from each other. “Vak K,” the part in which the Cabinet is seated, is completely surrounded by a low wooden wall, which makes them in a way protected from the rest of the people. The interruption barrier (for members who respond to or question members of the cabinet) is comparable, with the exception that in this case the wall starts at about 20 cm above the ground, so that the member’s feet remain visible.

SENSORIMOTOR COUPLING

The second category of ways in which body and the world are interwoven concerns more

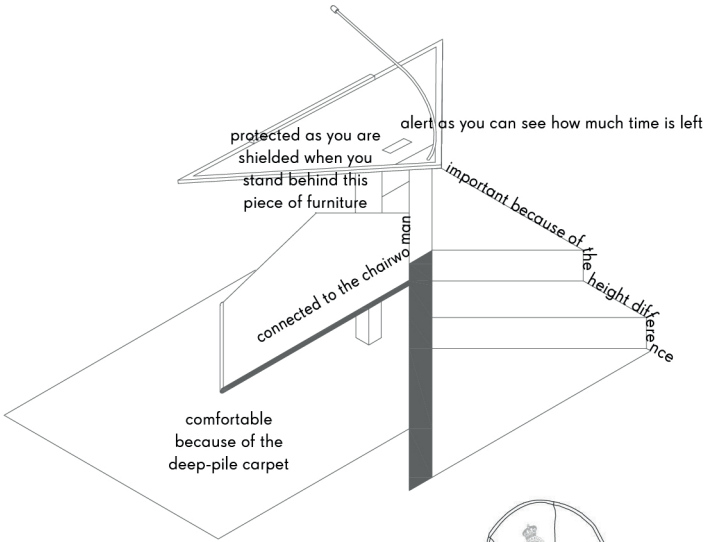


FIG.4: POSSIBLE EMOTIONAL STATES EVOKED BY THE LECTERN FOR SPEAKING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

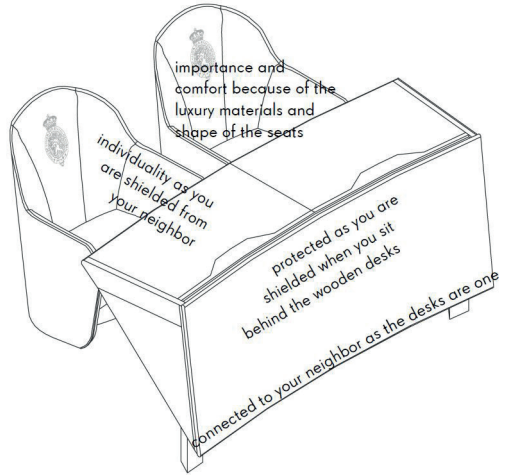


FIG.5: POSSIBLE EMOTIONAL STATES EVOKED BY THE DESKS AND SEATS OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

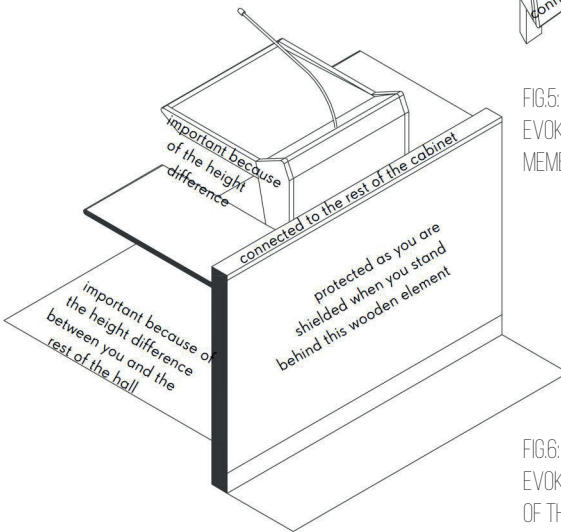


FIG.6: POSSIBLE EMOTIONAL STATES EVOKED BY THE LECTERN FOR MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

elaborate actions and movements through the environment. These movements are made possible by our so-called motor system, which is much more connected to perception than has previously been presupposed. As Susan Hurley explains in *Consciousness in Action*, following up on for example the work by Ulric Neisser, the generally assumed divide between the body and the mind has resulted in an input-output picture of perception.¹⁸ In that picture, perception forms the input from the world to the mind and action forms the output. The mind mediates between these two states: through thought it links the right input to the right output. However, discarding the Cartesian divide leads to the conclusion that perception and action are much more interwoven with each other than traditional views have acknowledged. Building on, amongst other theories, what has been called the *reafference principle*, Thompson and Varela explain, “situated activity takes the form of cycles of sensorimotor coupling with the environment. What the organism senses is a function of how it moves, and how it moves is a function of what it senses.”¹⁹

This point was already developed in the 1970s by James Gibson in his theory of affordances.²⁰ He argued that humans (and other animals) perceive the world through the actions that are possible within it. We encounter the affordances present in the environment, rather than perceiving the world through something like a photograph, in which all details are grasped at once. What the environment affords is what it offers, provides or furnishes an animal to do in it. A flat surface, for example, is seen as walk-on-able, a surface about 40 cm above the ground is sit-on-able, and round objects that can be grasped in the hand are throw-able and catch-able. Such affordances are different for each animal or person, related to their individual capabilities.

The theory of affordances means that the designed environment of architecture is perceived in the same way, through the actions that it affords.

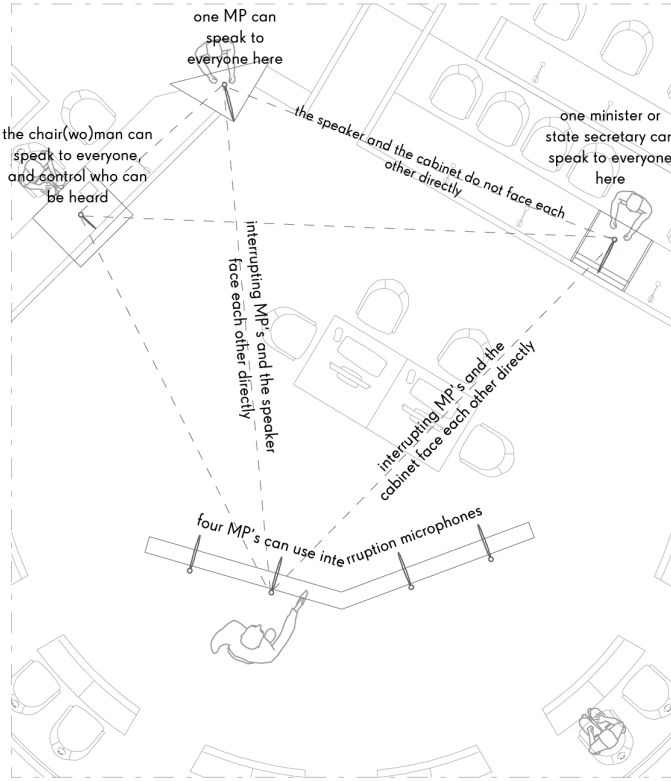


FIG.7: ACTIONS OF SPEAKING AFFORDED IN THE CENTER OF THE HALL

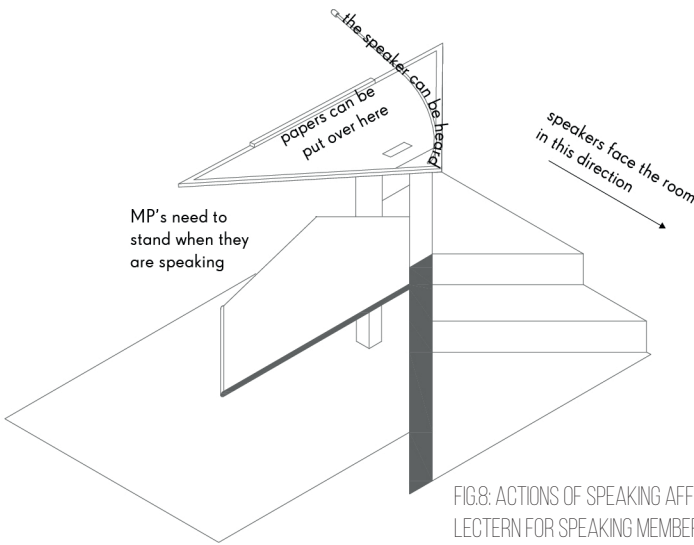


FIG.8: ACTIONS OF SPEAKING AFFORDED BY THE LECTERN FOR SPEAKING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

In the description of a relatively simple process of getting milk from a store nearby, architectural theorist Sarah William Goldhagen shows how these processes continually take place, mostly unconsciously, leaving room for thoughts about plans for the weekend.²¹ It shows how the built environment is continuously used as a means to something else, rather than being observed as a neutral object.

Stairs are perceived as providing the possibility to ascend, arcades are perceived for the possibility of walking through, and windows invite you to look outside. They do not determine the user to undertake any of these actions, but through the processes by which we perceive the environment and instrumentalize it for our actions, they do provide us with countless invitations which we do or do not act upon. The impact of an affordance therefore does not lie in the determination of a person's actions (so I agree with Buday, the idea of "environmental determinism," is problematic), but in the invitation it offers.²²

Furthermore, although the environment cannot determine what actions a user will undertake, it does often constrain the way in which actions can be performed.²³ Stairs do not determine you to ascend, but they dictate where you will enter the next floor if you do. Arcades do not determine you to walk through them, but they do influence which rooms are the most accessible. And a window does not determine you to look through it, but it does influence what you will see if you do.

In case of the plenary meeting hall, the affordances offered by the design are effectively endless, continuously inviting the users in the room to undertake certain actions. On a most basic level the room therefore both expresses and invites the activities it is designed for: a composition of seats, desks and microphones shows the purpose of using the room for Plenary meetings by the parliament. [Fig. 7-11] Some of these affordances

“STAIRS DO NOT DETERMINE THE USER TO UNDERTAKE ANY ACTIONS, BUT ... THEY DO PROVIDE US WITH COUNTLESS INVITATIONS WHICH WE DO OR DO NOT ACT UPON.”

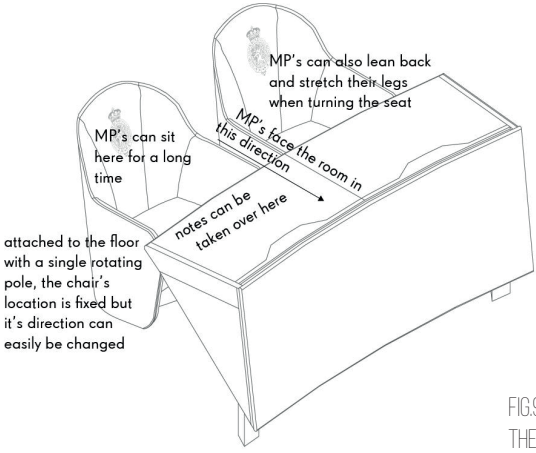


FIG.9: ACTIONS OF OBSERVING AFFORDED BY THE SEATS OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

FIG.10: ACTIONS OF WALKING AFFORDED BY THE CENTER OF THE HALL



have clear consequences for how the debates usually take place. Consider for example the position of lecterns relative to each other: they determine how the different users are facing one another when they speak. Members of Cabinet always face the Members of Parliament that respond to them using the interruption microphone, but they are standing parallel to the ones that are presenting a longer story. Furthermore, the lecterns often presuppose their users to be standing up, otherwise the microphone cannot be reached. This same microphone makes sure its users are facing the centre of the meeting hall, as they are positioned in a certain way. The Chair(wo)man can control who is allowed to speak, as he or she can turn microphones on and off.

The arrangement of seats in the room forms the basis for how members of parliament are sitting in relation to the Cabinet and the Chair(wo)man during the plenary meetings. The seats provide room for 150 Members of Parliament, who are divided into six segments of 25 members. Some of these members are therefore closer to the debate than others, and might be quicker to use the interruption microphones than the so-called “backbenchers” behind them.²⁴ The different parties are spread among the segments, so that members of a party are not necessarily sitting together in one group, and often mix with other parties. Walking paths between the segments make it possible to walk to the centre of the room or the hallway under the public stands, but they also provide space for members to discuss matters with each other between different debates. These are just a few examples of the long list of affordances offered by the meeting hall, that show what kind of impact they might have on the way in which daily activities take place.

INTERSUBJECTIVE INTERACTION

The third category of “cycles of operation” concerns things that are active in social cognition and help humans understand each other. These

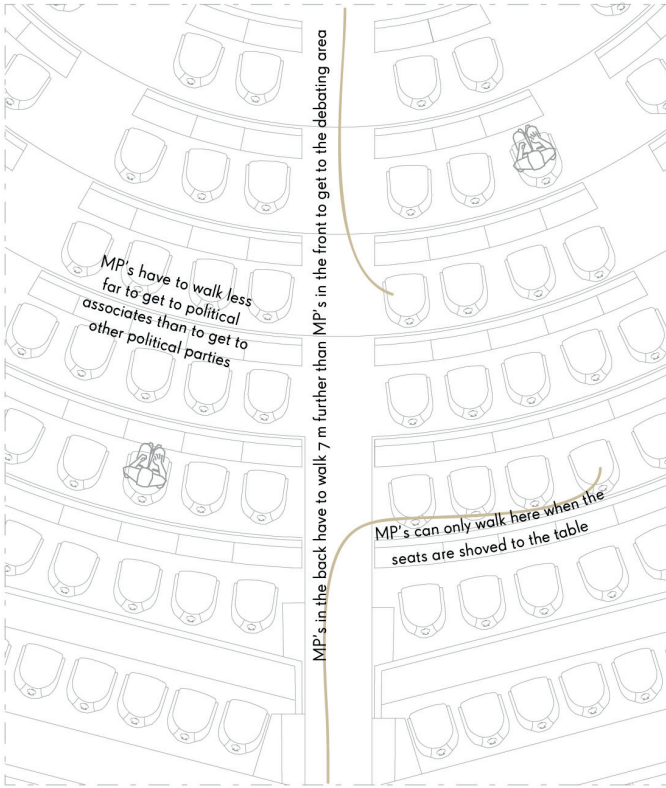


FIG.11: ACTIONS OF WALKING AFFORDED BETWEEN SEATS OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

cycles make it possible to interpret others, and reason about their intentions, their desires and their emotions. Intersubjective interaction involves both structures that are also important to emotion as well as sensorimotor coupling and more specifically the use of mirror-neuron systems. In the 1990s a team of scientists discovered so-called mirror neurons that fire not only when we perform particular activities, but also when we see someone else performing that activity.²⁵ This discovery has led scientists to believe that these neurons play a role in the understanding of emotions, actions and intentions of others (when these are already part of our own repertoire).²⁶ For example, when we see someone else feeling sad, we virtually mirror this expression (although we do not carry out the actual movement) and by “observing” our own feelings arising from this expression, we understand the other is sad. So, we use ourselves as a kind of

simulator, mirroring others, in order to make sense of the world.

This process is generally known as empathy. According to Vittorio Gallese, one of the discoverers of mirror neurons, we use this process constantly.²⁷ Mirror neurons are active not only when we perceive other human beings, but also in the observation of inanimate objects. Recent fMRI studies have shown that neurons activated when we are being touched, fire when we perceive someone else being touched, but also when we perceive objects touching one another, such as when we see raindrops falling on the leaves of a plant.²⁸ We not only use ourselves to simulate the actions and emotions of other people, but also to simulate our environment. This has led Gallese to replace the word “empathy” with “embodied simulation,” and argue that “the sense we attribute to our lived experience of the world is grounded in the affect-laden relational quality of our body’s action potentialities, enabled by the way they are mapped in our brains.”²⁹

Remarkably enough, when the first theories of empathy originated at the end of the nineteenth century, they were part of a philosophical theory on aesthetics, not of how we socially engage with other people. The German theorist Robert Vischer published *On the Optical Sense of Form*, in which he distinguished between *Sehen* as a relatively passive form of visual perception, and *Schauen* as a more active one.³⁰ Aesthetic experience, with which reality is “grasped,” is based on the latter kind. During this aesthetic experience, we go through a process of *Einfühlung*, by which we “feel ourselves into” or simulate what we encounter. The environment is “reflected in certain vibrations and—who knows what—neural modifications” that make the experience possible.³¹ Vischer’s theories were followed by Theodor Lipps, whose *Ästhetik*, published at the start of the nineteenth century, explored the analysis of empathy in aesthetic experience further.³² He argued that everything we

“REMARKABLY ENOUGH, WHEN THE FIRST THEORIES OF EMPATHY ORIGINATED AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, THEY WERE PART OF A PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY ON AESTHETICS, NOT OF HOW WE SOCIALLY ENGAGE WITH OTHER PEOPLE.”

experience is permeated by our own life. The experienced object is the result of both what has been given by the environment and the activity of the observer. For Lipps, aesthetic experience arose from the feeling or movement that an object evokes in us. For example, a great hall evokes a movement of expansion, and from that we understand its greatness. In the case of the Dutch parliament, which is itself a great hall, the aesthetic experience could include this same greatness both in the height of the ceiling as well as in the large tapestries on the wall. It can also include the appreciation of the clean shapes of pearwood in the furniture or the craftsmanship that must have been involved making it, although this interpretation of *Einfühlung* involves much more elaborate systems than simply mirror-neurons.³³

Furthermore, it has been suggested that mirror systems play an important role in language as well. Neuroscientist Michael Arbib hypothesizes that the ability to recognize manual actions in others provided a bridge via pantomime and imitation for the human capacity for both sign and spoken language.³⁴ Following this, intersubjective interaction enables us to interpret and make sense of our environment. So, it is through this system and its integration with other systems that we can talk about concepts or messages that are communicated by architecture, based on their physical composition and the actions, both practical and emotional, that they make possible.

Following Giacomo Rizzolatti and Michael Arbib in linking our mirror system to the highly evolved neural and social systems that enable us to use language and other forms of symbolic abstraction, it is through this last cycle that we understand the symbolic meaning provided by architecture. In the case of the Dutch Parliament, one can interpret the coat of arms printed on the seats of Members of Parliament as referring to the Dutch nation. Furthermore, we might interpret the hierarchy of different roles played in the debates through the differences in how luxuriously each seat is designed, through subtle height differences and through accents in the composition of desks such as the higher one or the Chair(wo)man.

It is also through this cycle that we might interpret the green carpet, the grey ceiling and the tulip-shaped seats as representations of the Dutch landscape, as explained in a brochure on the “meaning” of de Bruijn’s design.³⁵ Users however need quite some information to understand this connection. While people who have foreknowledge might indeed associate these symbols with what they represent, others not armed with such cultural apparatus will be unlikely to understand it that way.

As stated above, Thompson and Varela mention the involvement of processes of the first and second cycles in the third.³⁶ Processes important

to emotions are also part of recognizing emotions in others, and mirror neurons are themselves part of sensorimotor systems. And the intertwining goes still further: evoked emotional states are probably also dependent on the affordances and messages one recognizes, and the perceived affordances are related to a person's mood or their interpretation of the function of the room. The purpose of the framework is therefore not so much to separate each kind of impact but rather to show the elaborate range of impacts that are possible within one design.

The implication of the theories as laid out above is that, without impact to the form of some physical change in the body there is no experience. Architectural experience therefore *only exists through this impact*. Still, such impact does not *determine* the behaviour of a building's users. The two following remarks offer partial explanation in this regard.

A NETWORK OF ACTORS

Firstly, this impact is spread throughout an endless network of little impacts that each play their own small yet significant role. The three kinds of cycles of operation reveal an elaborate and complicated range of endless modes of exchange between the world and the body, as the case-study has shown as well. Relations originate at different levels and in different ways at the same time and are therefore hardly ever observable as a one-to-one relationship between a design decision and a (behavioural) change.

How this works has previously been laid out by the so-called 'Actor-Network-Theory', conceived by sociologists and philosophers, of which Bruno Latour, John Law and Michel Callon are the best-known examples.³⁷ One of their basic claims is that in social processes, objects can play a role similar to that of human beings. Both animate and inanimate objects participate in our social lives significantly, together forming a large network of countless "actors" that each play a role. One design decision

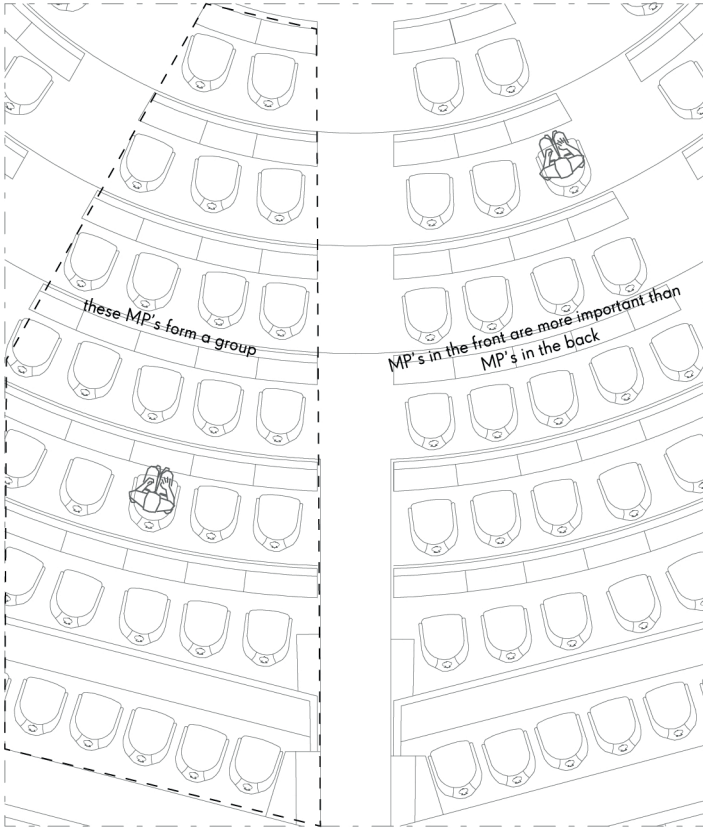


FIG.12: POSSIBLE MESSAGES CONVEYED THROUGH THE ARRANGEMENT OF SEATS IN SEGMENTS

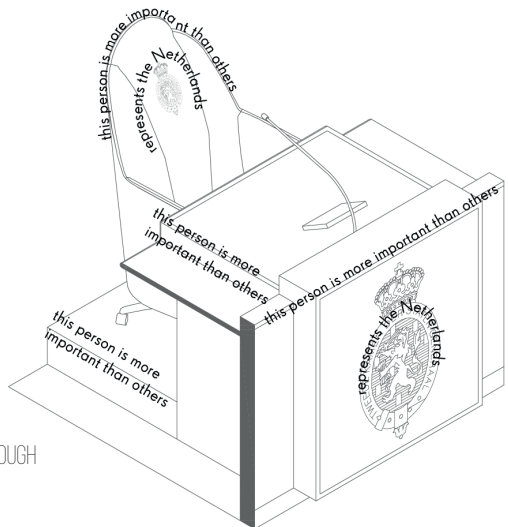


FIG.13: POSSIBLE MESSAGES CONVEYED THROUGH THE FURNITURE OF THE CHAIR(WOMAN)

can be seen as a drop in an ocean of actors, only some of them related to the designed physical environment. Pedestrians' experience of a street, for example, can be seen as the sum of decisions like the general proportions, the plasticity of facades or the position of windows, etc., forming only a piece in a larger network of other determining factors, like recent events in the pedestrian's life or her his general mood that day.

Some attempts have been made to show determinant relations between design decisions and their effect on users. Take, for instance, research on the layout of hospital rooms in relation to the healing process, or educational environments in relation to learning processes.³⁸ Or, closer to our case-study, consider how research in 2018 showed a relation between the voting behaviour of parliament members and their position relative to each other in the room.³⁹ However useful such studies may be, they should always be interpreted with regard to the specificity of the case-studies on which they were based. In another situation the conditions might very well be different, so that the same design decisions could lead to different results.

DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

Secondly, it is worth considering the compatibilist view of philosopher Daniel Dennett, who argues that a deterministic universe does not rule out free will.⁴⁰ He distinguishes between things in what he calls the *scientific image* on the one hand and the *manifest image* on the other. The first group consists of things like neurons, atoms and DNA, things that we know mostly from scientific research. The second group consists of things that we encounter in our everyday lives: colours, euros and promises, etc. These things have no location or substance and scientifically speaking they are not what people generally consider them to be. Free will is part of this latter group, so according to Dennett, free will is just as real as the colours, euros and promises that

play a significant role in everyday life. Scientifically speaking, one fact necessarily leads to another, however the endless number of causes and effects are impossible to sort-out in the lived-world of manifest images.

We can apply this way of thinking to what we have encountered in this article: at a scientific level, the impact of the built environment on the user is a prerequisite for any environmental experience and this impact is part of a large network of different actors. In the practical world of manifest images, however, this network cannot possibly be understood in its entirety and therefore the effect of design decisions remains unpredictable to a certain extent. This means that in the lived-world of any subject experiencing the environment, the shaping role of design can only be more or less present and recognizable. Furthermore, the design process itself largely takes place at this practical level too, which makes it unlikely for a designer to foresee all the consequences of the countless design decisions he/she must make, either consciously or unconsciously.

EMPATHY

From the first part of this article we could conclude that claiming design decisions have no impact is problematic. From the second part we can add that claiming causality between design decision x and result y is equally problematic, as the full breadth of the network in which this impact is integrated cannot be understood from the practical level of our lived world and the design process. To conclude, I would like to draw attention to the skill of empathy being employed by the architect during the design process, which is of special relevance in this regard. During this process, in which the designer imagines himself or herself to be part of the environment he or she is designing, it is possible to assess many aspects at once, instead of focussing on the “drop in the ocean” of a single design decision. It offers the possibility to be receptive to what the environment has to offer instead of considering it solely in light of the conceptual ideas it was built on.

Furthermore, we can see empathy as a skill that can be enriched: the aforementioned studies on healing environments, for instance, may be too specific to be implemented directly into other designs, but they provide insights that can be integrated into empathic processes, as do the theories on cognitive science of architectural experience. Moreover, these processes can be further enhanced in light of the plurality of identities of the future users. Knowledge of the identity of different end-users, or participatory processes in which contact between the designer and the end-user is established, improve the possibility of the designers’ capacity to understand the experience of other identities.

In this way, the skill of empathy can enrich the designers' understanding of the effects their designs are likely to have and then to help align their decisions with their renovated understanding of users' experiences. Empathy can contribute to an environment that finds a balance between its facilitating role in our lived-world daily processes while being receptive both to the plurality and the freedom of its users.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With special thanks to the reviewers and Michael Arbib for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The drawings and analyses are based on the following literature:

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Joris Luyendijk, *Je hebt het niet van mij, maar...: Een maand aan het Binnenhof* (Amsterdam: Podium, 2010)

The drawings are also based on the following two interviews:

“WE CAN
SEE EMPATHY
AS A SKILL
THAT CAN BE
ENRICHED.”

Alexander Pechtold, interviewed by the author. *An interview on the role of the interior design of the Second Chamber in the debating culture* (7 September 2016)

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Complemented with research conducted in the architectural archive of The New Institute, Rotterdam and the personal archive of Pi de Bruijn.

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ON FOOT: EMBODIED ATMOSPHERES

ANDREEA MIHALACHE

FIRST STEP: WALKING IN BERNARDO(S) SANDALS

Challenging what he criticized as the straitjacket of fashion, in 1946 the architect, designer, and author Bernard Rudofsky launched the line of footwear Bernardo Sandals. Making present the bodily awareness of the horizontal plane, they were designed to adapt to, rather than constrain, the anatomy of the foot, aspiring to remain timeless pieces, comfortable and wearable outside fads and short-lived trends. Decades later, they are still defying the passage of time.

More than mere footwear, the sandals are a design manifesto expressing the connection between feet and floors, always in touch through the intimacy of the sole, a relationship Rudofsky celebrates in architectural and design projects. Building upon the multiple meanings of the Italian word *pianta*,¹ he notes the attraction between the sole of the foot (*la pianta del piede*) that caresses the sole of the house, and also its plan (*la pianta della casa*).² Departing from modernist notions about the functionality and efficiency of plan organization, he establishes an affinity between the plan of the house and the materiality of its pavement: “The pavement will control the plan. Only on a good plan one can make a good pavement.”³ Not only does the floor become the place of interaction between the architectural body and the human body, but—this essay argues—it generates the mood and atmosphere of a place.

This text begins from an intellectual nudge. Critical of scientific ecology in the research on the environment, philosopher Gernot Böhme introduces the “aesthetics of atmospheres” as an operative concept that factors in the subjectivity of

human experience in architectural and urban design. Looking at different scales of perception from architectural objects to urban landscapes, he contends that “atmosphere is the subject matter of architecture,”⁴ to which architectural critic David Leatherbarrow replies: “Is it?”⁵ Building upon the aesthetics of atmospheres (Böhme) and their association with habits (Leatherbarrow), this essay will walk the reader through Bernard Rudofsky’s constructions of embodied atmospheres, arguing that, unexpectedly, for Rudofsky the locus where atmospheres manifest themselves is the horizontal plane of the floor. As one moves through space, be it indoors or outdoors, the most immediate (yet unnoticed) encounter is the one with the pavement. Soft or hard, warm or cold, smooth or rough, ground planes have latent possibilities to provide the first opportunities for the body to know and feel its world. Engaging with the floors, one becomes attuned to the rhythms, pace, temperatures, textures, and sounds of the world.

Like other midcentury architects, Rudofsky recognizes that modern architecture, and, in a larger sense, the consumer culture, have alienated people from their places. If to lose one’s place in the world is—quite literally—to lose ground, then becoming aware of the surfaces we step on might reconnect us to a deeper sense of the self. Beyond aesthetics, his attention to floors and pavements ultimately reflects an ethical concern with defining one’s place in the world.

SECOND STEP: PASSING THROUGH ATMOSPHERIC HABITS

The emergence and frequency of the terms and concepts we employ both in research and informal language indicate tacit concerns underlying our everyday lives, as well as broader societal and cultural anxieties. Etymologically, the term *atmosphere* (from Greek *atmos* = vapor and *sphaira* = globe) originally designated the ring of vapor supposed to be “exhaled from the body of a planet,”⁶ but from the eighteenth century onward, it has also conveyed a “certain mood hanging in the air.”⁷ *Moods, affects, atmospheres*—appropriated into the architectural vocabulary from psychology and physics, these concepts have become recurrent themes in the work of many contemporary architects and theorists. If one notices an increased frequency of these terms in the architectural discourse, it is not because architecture has not been concerned with them in the past, but, rather, because a certain discontent with the current experience of the environment is prompting the search for answers outside the tangible and the measurable. A sign of a certain disenchantment with the quotidian, it speaks about the dissatisfaction with the banality of everyday experiences constantly mediated through screens and simulated realities. As philosopher Richard Kearney observes, “The more virtually connected

we are, the more solitary we become. We ‘see’ brave new worlds, but ‘feel’ less and less in touch with them.”⁸

The interest in atmospheres traverses fields and disciplines. In architecture, Peter Zumthor, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Steven Holl are among the most notable contemporary designers and theorists invested in the topic of atmospheres, but ideas about constructing the atmosphere of a place are not new. Alberto Perez-Gomez observes an implicit interest in atmospheres as early as Vitruvius’ *Ten Books on Architecture*, where a tempered and balanced environment was at the core of a healthy life.⁹ Building upon current scientific evidence demonstrating the role of feelings, emotions, and moods that architecture engenders in our psychosomatic health, he demonstrates the importance of studying these hidden and unmeasurable dimensions of architecture.¹⁰ Juhani Pallasmaa observes that it was only from the mid-1990s onward that the experience of architecture has begun to replace a long-established formal approach to design.¹¹ Indeed, it seems that theorizing unquantifiable and elusive concepts such as *atmosphere*, *mood* or *ambiance* has emerged as a relatively new phenomenon in the early 2000s.¹² This “atmospheric turn” has various explanations that range from deterministic views to social and political arguments, from subjectivity to scientific evidence.¹³ Peter Zumthor defines *atmosphere* as an almost-mystical quality of a space, intrinsic to those architectures that move you.¹⁴ He finds it in “the magic of things, the magic of the real world,”¹⁵ and believes that it offers a possible response to the quest for “architectural quality.”¹⁶

From the atmosphere of medieval cathedrals (built on the transfiguration of light passing through stained glass), to the Renaissance villas in the Italian Veneto (intimately connected with existing natural caves and breathing the air that circulated naturally through a sophisticated system of vents and ducts),

“ONE BECOMES
ATTUNED
TO THE
RHYTHMS,
PACE,
TEMPERATURES,
TEXTURES,
AND SOUNDS
OF THE WORLD”

to Eileen Gray's marvelous E.1027 house (centered on experiencing the space through sensuous materials and textures defining the mood of each room), or Le Corbusier's *espace indicible* (suggesting a phenomenal experience of the space), architects have long tackled—both explicitly and implicitly—the atmosphere of a place.

In philosophy, the influential work of Hermann Schmitz, regarded as a founding father of research on atmospheres, left its mark on the writings of contemporary continental philosophers such as Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero.¹⁷ The former explicitly calls into question the primacy of vision in people's interaction with the environment and advocates for integrated approaches to architecture and city planning, in both design and scholarship, that should carefully consider and actively engage all our senses. Böhme observes that atmospheres have an in-between quality: they relate factual traits of the environment with one's bodily feeling in that environment, so are both spatial and emotional.¹⁸ In other words, they are situated between the subject and the object: they touch one's bodily space, which is "neither the place a person's body takes up, nor the volume that it constitutes," but the sphere of one's material presence.¹⁹ Therefore, atmospheres are about presence, and never about representation. Böhme proposes that examining architecture and cities through the lens of the aesthetics of atmosphere produces two major shifts: first, the turn from "what" something represents to "how" something is present.²⁰ (Thus, "aesthetics" recovers its original meaning, that of a theory of perception, rather than the visual concern with beauty and artistic taste prevalent from the eighteenth century onward.) Second, it enables the shift from the form or shape of things to the way they engage with the space of our bodily presence.²¹ For Böhme, atmosphere is the subject matter of architecture.²²

Pondering over the meaning and implications of this argument, David Leatherbarrow nuances Böhme's theory and outlines—not unlike Le Corbusier's tenets for a new architecture—five points on architectural atmospheres.²³ First, they manifest themselves immediately or, like Böhme also remarked, they are about presence. Second, they are specific to historical and cultural contexts, which suggests that they cannot be transferred or replicated outside of where they are formed. Third, they are a matter of both emotions and intellect. Fourth, they construct backgrounds, in the double sense of layers of history and present appearances. Lastly, atmospheres are correlated with habits.²⁴

The latter is perhaps the most relevant for the argument of this essay: the idea that the mood of a space emerges from concrete, material conditions, from practices and rituals that are enacted and performed in unique historical and cultural contexts. Leatherbarrow observes that

practical experience and everyday use are key in creating atmospheres, which play a two-part role, “initial and global, then marginal and tacit.”²⁵ Simply put, one first perceives them as distinct phenomena in the foreground of their experience (the way a traveler visiting a medieval city for the first time might register and treasure every uncanny detail), but eventually, by force of habit and repetition, they recede into the background (the way an inhabitant of the same historic city is no longer aware of what has become familiar and well-known). Leatherbarrow proposes that atmospheres are neither an attribute of the settings from which they proceed, nor a matter of individual sentiments – he draws attention, instead, to the continuity, rather than the split, between object and subject.

His approach implicitly challenges Böhme’s argument that stage set design (where moods are fabricated from objective and carefully manipulated elements such as sound, illumination or spatial geometries) is the paradigm for a theory of atmosphere.²⁶ One of Böhme’s tacit goals is to remove the impreciseness associated with atmospheres and demonstrate that, despite their vagueness, they can be produced from concrete factors. However, his use of stage set design as the paradigm for this theory privileges conventions and artificiality as *modus operandi*, suggesting scripted and therefore predictable scenarios, and thus removing the sense of spontaneity or happenstance. On the other hand, if habits are intrinsic to the formation of atmospheres, as Leatherbarrow suggests, then the design process alone does not have the power to fully prescribe specific ambiances, therefore one needs to understand the environment through a more-encompassing lens, not only beyond its immediate physical manifestations but also from within the factors that have constituted it throughout time this is to say that atmosphere are not about spontaneous surfacing or controlled design, but rather that critical to grasping their nature is understanding

practices of inhabitation developed and sedimented over time.

It is this balancing act between control and release, between design practices and living practices, between space and time, between the measurable and the immeasurable that Bernard Rudofsky tackles in many of his writings and projects spanning the middle and late decades of the twentieth century, where he centers his attention on the overlooked role of floors and pavements.

THIRD STEP: TOUCHING THE FLOOR

Known primarily for his 1964 exhibition (and subsequent catalog) *Architecture without Architects*, Rudofsky was a tireless traveler, an ingenious footwear designer, a prolific writer, and a gifted architect. At a time when most architects looked up above the ground to see as a prevailing mode to perceive the environment, he looked down to feel the touch of the floor. Despite his consistent return to the theme of floors and pavements, scholarship has only marginally examined what is at stake in his obsessive return to these horizontal surfaces.²⁷ Rudofsky offers an architectural and existential way of anchoring us into the world through floors and pavements as the often-overlooked canvas against which life itself unfolds. They construct the mood of a place by being active agents of our various practices of inhabitation.

“Stone mosaic, marble slabs, stucco reliefs, mural decorations from the simplest geometric ornamentation to elaborate paintings, were employed [*in Roman outdoor rooms*] to establish a mood particularly conducive to spiritual composure,” writes Rudofsky in 1952.²⁸ That pavements define the character of a room and have the potential to generate spiritual dispositions was well-known in ancient civilizations: “Do you know the Faun House in Pompei? Here we understand why the Pompeians who inherited the Greek culture could easily give up the frescoes: they had paintings of profound beauty on the floor.”²⁹

The ground plane is what ties together the individual, the house, and the city: house floor or city pavement, the horizontal surface, intimately related to the human body through the sense of touch, is the first element that creates the mood of a space. The floors have the potential to delay movement, slow down the pace, and, implicitly, expand time. As the only surfaces that constantly engage the sense of touch, they are neither purely functional, nor merely aesthetic. Rarely seen, they are always felt. It is through floors and pavements that the sense of touch remains active, and yet paradoxically, designs often overlook them. Floors and pavements carry an inherent contradiction: on the one hand, they need not to be noticed in order to function properly; on the other, as they become

unnoticed, they take away one's awareness of the ground. Through floors and pavements, individuals experience the unmediated presence of the earth while at the same time gain a sense of belonging to a larger community. They ground human beings into the earth and situate them within the horizon of a specific culture.

Although Western philosophy has primarily been sight-centered, in the twentieth century existential phenomenology recovered Aristotle's claim in *De Anima* that touch is the most universal, pervasive, and intelligent of the senses.³⁰ Against the Platonic idea that sight is superior to touch because it is distant and mediated (hence the elevated status of *theoria*, i.e. to look at, to speculate), Aristotle argues that touch, in fact, does have a medium and its medium is the flesh.³¹ Through touch one reads and interprets the world and at the same time is touched by it. It is in this reciprocity between the self and the world that Rudofsky situates his interest in the continuity between the sole of the foot, the pavement of the building, and the skin of the earth.

For Rudofsky, the act of building starts from floors and walls, the most vital elements of the architectural vocabulary that also give human beings the ontological status of their upright posture. "A wall is the bread of architecture. (...) Building his first wall, he [*the man*] became, mentally, a biped."³² Elsewhere, he writes: "The floor is, literally and figuratively, the touchstone of a civilization. A good floor is much more than a delight to the eye; it appeals to that most sensuous of our senses, touch."³³ In the February 1938 issue of the Italian architecture journal *Domus*, Rudofsky publishes what appears to be an illustration of an architectural foundational moment: builders have laid out in plan the foundations of the outer walls of a house and are now settling the stones to stabilize the structure. Rudofsky's caption stresses the primordial role of the floor and floorplan as the organizing forces of the building: "Architecture begins with a pavement:

“IF HABITS ARE INTRINSIC TO THE FORMATION OF ATMOSPHERES, AS LEATHERBARROW SUGGESTS, THEN THE DESIGN PROCESS ALONE DOES NOT HAVE THE POWER TO FULLY PRESCRIBE SPECIFIC AMBIANCES”

the architect inscribes order in the freedom of nature. But this order has to be in harmony with nature.”³⁴

The drawing recalls ancient practices of inscribing the plan of a building at full-scale onto the site itself. As Paul Emmons observes, the construction of the plan on site anticipates the future building, establishing an intimate connection between drawing, site, and architecture.³⁵ While in pre-modern times, the floor was the actual floor plan of the new construction, this intimate relationship has been gradually lost with the changing practices of architectural drawing.³⁶ No longer viewed as an embodied footprint, but primarily as a horizontal section, today the floor plan bears little, if any affinity at all with the architectural floor.³⁷ Challenging these modern forms of representation, Rudofsky explores drawings and buildings as embodied phenomena. The surface of the page, the surface of the building floor, and the surface of the site itself become one and thus the pavement acquires its ontological role. Because “every culture has its perfect pavement,”³⁸ floors teach more about a certain civilization than any writings or indirect accounts.³⁹

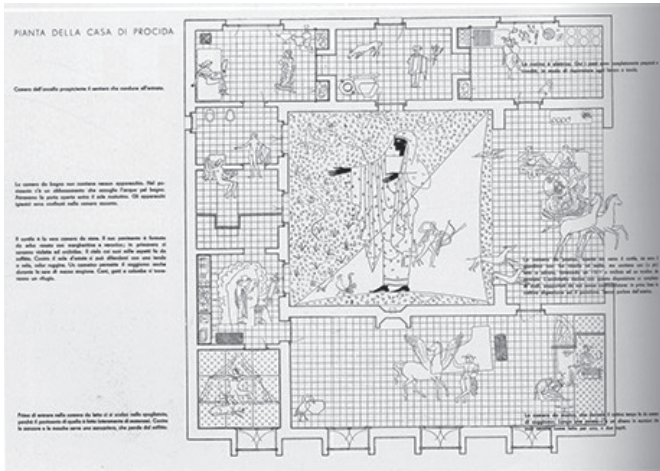


FIG 1: BERNARD RUDOFSKY, PLAN OF THE PROCIDA HOUSE PROJECT
PUBLISHED IN *DOMUS*, ISSUE 123 (MARCH 1938)

Throughout his career, Rudofsky remains a relentless critic of the commodification of architecture both in the domestic realm and in the public sphere. In 1955, he publishes *Behind the Picture Window*, a collection of essays on the nature of the modern house, written as satires, rather than academic papers. The chapters lay out his frustrations with the “American way of life”⁴⁰ and propose what he calls elsewhere “a new way of living”⁴¹ based on lessons learned from past civilizations. One

such example (which he describes in a later book) are the Neolithic houses in Lindenthal, Germany discovered in the early decades of the twentieth century, and which reveal to Rudofsky a methodical architectural strategy that is neither accidental nor clumsy.⁴² Central to their design is the sculpted floor that celebrates the intimate encounter of the body with the earth and, as the authors infer, situates the individual in a specific horizon of inhabitation:

What lifts the Lindenthal houses above the commonplace is their sculpted floor. (...) Pausing for a moment in the amble of our flat-footed way of life (...) it seems that somewhere in the course of human advancement we lost our capacity for enjoying well-turned-out space. What probably happened is that our *Fingerspitzengefühl*—our “fingertip feeling”—progressively deserted us while numbness crept up on our toes and buttocks, body parts traditionally hidden. Yet it is exactly these parts that are instrumental in probing the ground on which we walk, stand, or sit, for they, like no others, keep us in close touch with our surroundings.⁴³

The metaphor of the “fingertip feeling” evokes both the sense of touch and a design intuition, that—neither exact, nor imprecise—is built upon practice and habits, and relies upon all senses. Poetry seizes the synesthetic experience born at the encounter of sight and touch: “I see with my fingertips / what my eyes touch.”⁴⁴ If one can *see* with their fingers, then one can also *know* with the toes of their feet that—not unlike one’s hands—feel, sense, and make sense of the environment through touch.

FOURTH STEP: ENTERING THE HOUSE

In 1938, Rudofsky publishes in *Domus* the drawings for a house on the island of Procida, off the coast of Naples. Titled “Non ci vuole un nuovo modo di costruire, ci vuole un nuovo modo di vivere” (translated in English as “What We Need is not New Technologies, but a New Way of Living”), the article

“THAT
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constitutes, as Rudofsky himself will acknowledge later, the kernel of “half a dozen books on architecture, apparel and related matters.”⁴⁵ Designed for a piece of land that he and his wife Berta bought on the island in 1935, the project, although never built, is Rudofsky’s design manifesto for the ideal house. (fig. 1) A harmonious encounter between architecture and the practices of everyday life, the ideal home eliminates the unnecessary prostheses of consumerism, seeking an unmediated relationship between inhabitants, their customs, nature, and design.

Having lived and worked in Italy for several years, Rudofsky praised and learned from the integration of landscape, design, and lifestyle that he noted (and idealized) in the peninsula. Building bridges across time and space, his account of the Procida house recalls Pliny the Younger’s descriptions of his Tuscan Villa, rendered in minute details in his letters.⁴⁶ Pliny’s peripatetic narration moves from the larger scale of landscape and climate to renditions of individual rooms, all of which have an intentional relationship with the outdoors. Views, sounds, textures create an atmosphere attuned to the seasons, as well as the inhabitant’s lifestyle: “a little fountain, playing through several small pipes into a vase it encloses, produces a most pleasing murmur;” a bedroom with two different orientations looks upon a cascade “which entertains at once both the eye and the ear.” Rooms are carefully designed with the appropriate orientation that offers shade in the summer and sun exposure in the winter, as well as balanced views towards the Apennine valleys, vineyards, bodies of water, ivy-covered trees, cypresses, and roses.

In Rudofsky’s Procida project, carefully observed habits, rather than programmatic specifications, generate the atmosphere of each space, shown in hybrid forms of architectural representation that combine two-dimensional and perspectival views. The beginning of the article announces that people have long lost the contact with the ground.⁴⁷ From the horseback rider who needs special tools to remove her boots, to the woman wearing heels unsuited for walking, to the athlete or the ballerina, everyone has lost touch with the earth through the multiple layers interposed between the foot and the earth itself.⁴⁸ More than a rhetorical trope or a nostalgic longing for an idyllic pre-modern time, this statement indicates a deeper loss: the erosion of our grounding and the dissolution of tectonics. As Rudofsky writes elsewhere, modern houses, with their transparent walls, appear so light that they could fly away at any moment like a magic carpet.⁴⁹ The gradual disappearance of tectonics translates into human uprootedness, and this sense of displacement finds its physical expression in the cookie-cutter houses of suburban developments, which simultaneously respond to and create the need for artificial environments

that remain unchanged, irrespective of location, living customs or individual habits.

Designed in a modern vocabulary, the Procida house challenges modern assumptions about function and program. Although the rooms are designated through conventional nomenclature (living room, dining room, bedroom, bathroom, etc.), the project describes and responds to the activities taking place in these spaces, which are shown in unconventional forms of architectural representation. People's movements between inside and outside are choreographed through the materials and textures of floors. In a subtle play of scales and textures, the house transforms furniture into architecture and architecture into furniture. Considering them superfluous, Rudofsky eliminates the dining table, the desk, the night table, the kitchen table, and the bathtub.⁵⁰ Having its entire floor made of mattresses, the bedroom becomes an oversized bed (not unlike Japanese rooms covered in *tatami*),⁵¹ where one can only walk barefoot. In his theory of inhabitation, Rudofsky operates an essential distinction between washing (as the modern utilitarian act of removing dirt and grime) and bathing (as an ancient form of ritual or cultivated leisure).⁵² He expresses it by placing the toilet and the sink, and, respectively, the bathtub, in different spaces. The bathroom becomes, in fact, a bathtub: dipping into the ground, the floor carves it out from the ground plane itself, thus creating an intimate relationship between the body of the bather and the earth itself. The patio with its natural pavement of grass, daisies, violets, and orchids, is the true living room of the house, which itself "grows" from the floor plane. A tent in the summer and a fireplace (shared with the music room) in colder weather, allow for the year-round inhabitation of this outdoor room. Firmly anchored into the ground, the body of the house and the bodies of its inhabitants find their place in the world.

Shifting his attention from the domestic realm to the public sphere, in 1969 Rudofsky publishes *Streets for People: A Primer for Americans*, a book “about the great outdoors, the pedestrian street, and the people one meets there.”⁵³ Written at a time when America enthusiastically embraces suburban living while ignoring its urban centers and public spaces, the book has a twofold goal: to unpack the malfunctions of American cities in contrast with their European counterparts and to provide design resources for a future when even Americans will recognize the need for “a more dignified city life.”⁵⁴

Lavishly illustrated with Rudofsky’s own photographs and filled with erudite literary and musical references, each chapter addresses a particular theme: cleanliness and hygiene, covered urban structures (such as canopies, porticoes, and gallerias), urban practices (from walking and strolling to processions, rituals, and performances), soundscapes and street music, street names, stairs, bridges, elevated streets, water and street food. An entire chapter, “Diamant Streets and Crystal Pavements” (a reference to the frozen water canals of Venice), is dedicated to urban floors and their intimate connection with the body of the pedestrian. Textures and colors bring to life this canvas that unfolds under people’s feet often as an extension of the house floors. Evocative descriptions conjure up the marble- and lava-paved streets of antiquity, the splendor of Babylonian streets, the square hard stones of Florence, the pink marble mosaic of a street gutter in Evora, or brick-paved ramps with stone footholds for horses.

The atmosphere of the city results from the orchestration of all these different elements articulated on the ground plane, which, almost like a living creature, moves, undulates, and meanders. A firm presence in space, as Böhme describes the atmosphere, yet often tacit and marginal, as Leatherbarrow puts it, the city pavement establishes connections between different scales – the personal scale of the body, the convivial scale of the community, the larger one of the environment – and remains a ubiquitous, yet unremarkable, actor in the urban choreography of the city.

Rudofsky’s nostalgia for a pre-industrial society and for the cities of the Old World is more than anything a nostalgia for time as embodied duration, rather than instantaneity. While he often idealizes a far-from-perfect world, he presents architectural ideas whose goal is to slow down time. The floor is the architectural element with the immediate potential to make people tarry and linger as they move through space. The most inconspicuous, yet the most direct in its engagement with the body, the floor constructs the physical measure of our pace. By slowing down its pace, the body readjusts to its environment.

The floors Rudofsky imagines are often impractical, inaccessible to everyone, unsuited for comfortable walking, whimsical, and, sometimes, quite useless. However, what is at stake in his emphasis on the horizontal plane is the awareness of time as embodied experience (particularly relevant at a moment when architecture is mainly concerned with space) and the ethical dimension of finding one's place on earth. The in-between quality that Böhme attributes to atmospheres, along with Leatherbarrow's emphasis on habits and behaviors, are manifested in Rudofsky's celebration of floors as "the touchstone of a civilization."

LAST STEP: STROLLING AWAY

On the otherwise smooth and inconspicuous floor of the Arsenale Building at the 2021 Venice Architectural Biennale, one stumbles upon a mosaic of stones, some of them carved out in three-dimensional configurations, with their interiors gilded. Among the thought-provoking proposals displayed in the exhibition that float, fly, and defy gravity, this elegant gesture simply reminds us of where we stand in the world. Marking the earth, these golden hieroglyphs choreograph the dance between "I" and "us," between a body and a multitude of bodies, between low and high, below and above. Making us aware of the depth of our ground plane, (polished) stone and (shimmering) gold define a volume of space and its atmosphere. One of the most notable—and most subtle—projects at the Biennale, this installation designed by the Portuguese office Aires Mateus recognizes the forgotten role of pavements. "Architecture answers to its time. Some things, however, never change: we live together under the same sky; we live together on the same ground. The sky above our head, the ground under our feet: a natural metaphor of community."⁵⁵ If atmospheres are about presence, as Böhme contends, and they cannot exist in the absence of habits, as Leatherbarrow observes,

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RESULTS FROM THE
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UNDULATES, AND
MEANDERS.”

then the ground, as Rudofsky and Aires Mateus show, could become the starting point of further interrogations about the nature of atmospheric inhabitations. Ultimately, to sense the mood of a place and to find our pace and place in the world we might have to close our eyes and honor our “fingertip feeling.” We might have to *touch* instead of *look* and tiptoe our way through space so that not only do we *see* with the tips of our fingers, but also *understand* with the tips of our toes.

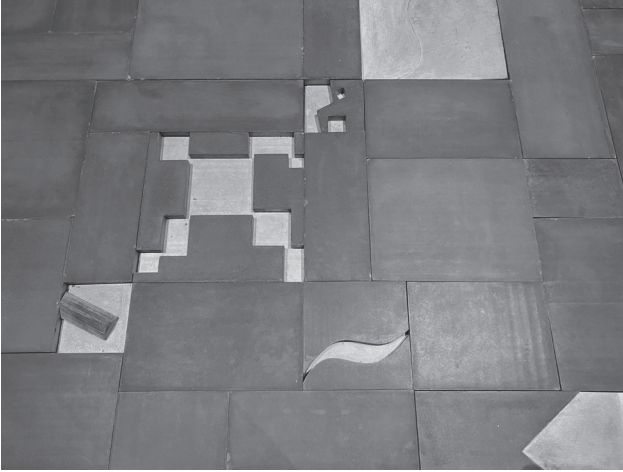


FIG 2: AIRES MATEUS, GROUND, VENICE BIENNALE IN 2021

ENDNOTES

1. Pianta means sole, a level in the house, but also a plant
2. Bernard Rudofsky, ‘Variazioni,’ *Domus*, Issue 124 (April 1938), 14
3. Rudofsky, ‘Variazioni,’ 15 (translation by the author)
4. Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 135-140; these ideas are first published in English in an earlier essay from 2002
5. David Leatherbarrow, ‘Atmospheric Conditions,’ In: Henriette Steiner and Maximilian Sternberg (eds.), *Phenomenologies of the City: Studies in the History and Philosophy of Architecture* (London: Ashgate, 2015)
6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, entry “atmosphere.”
7. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 2
8. Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 4-5
9. Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2016), 2
10. *Ibid.*, 1-13.

11. Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place, and Atmosphere: Peripheral Perception in Existential Experience,' In: Christian Borch (ed.), *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*. (Basel: Birkhauser, 2014), 19
12. Among the most recent publications in the field, one will find: *Journal of Architectural Education*, "Atmospheres," VI. 73 Issue 1 March 2019; Perez-Gomez, Alberto. *Attunement*; Borch (ed.), *Architectural Atmospheres*; Klaske Havik, Hans Teerds, and Gus Tielens, with Juhani Pallasmaa and Peter Zumthor, *Building Atmosphere. OASE#91* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2013); Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2006). Quite tellingly, Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* from 2000, a book that eruditely traces the philosophical and intellectual history of architectural terminology, does not include an entry on architectural moods or atmospheres.
13. Christian Borch justifies the rationale of a volume he edited in 2014 as a follow-up to current fads and fashions that examined the atmospheric qualities of architecture and urban spaces. (Borch, "Introduction: Why Atmospheres?" in Borch (ed.), *Architectural Atmospheres*)
14. Zumthor, *Atmospheres*, 11
15. *Ibid.*, 19
16. *Ibid.*, 11
17. In 1969, Hermann Schmitz publishes *The Sphere of the Emotions* where he discusses emotions as atmospheres. His work, which is still to be translated into English, exercised a decisive influence on Gernot Böhme (whose first publication on atmospheres, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, dates from 1995) and Tonino Griffiero (*Atmosferologia: Estetica degli spazi emozionali*, first published in 2010 and translated into English in 2014)
18. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 3

19. Ibid., 180
20. Ibid., 26
21. Ibid., 5
22. Ibid., 135-140
23. Leatherbarrow, 'Atmospheric Conditions,' 85-100
24. Ibid., 96
25. Ibid., 87
26. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 3
27. The topic appears in full book chapters or specific reflections in various articles. He dedicates an entire book to the theme of streets and street life (Bernard Rudofsky, *Streets for People: A Primer for Americans* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), designs and commercializes a line of footwear that exists to this day (the Bernardo Sandals), and introduces original, if impractical, floors in the exhibitions he curates.
28. Bernard Rudofsky, 'Giardino, stanza all'aperto: a proposito della casa giardino a Long Island, NY,' *Domus*, Issue 272 (July-August 1952), 5
29. Rudofsky, 'Variazioni,' 15
30. See Kearney, *Touch*, Ch.2 'Philosophies of Touch: From Aristotle to Phenomenology,' 33-60
31. Ibid., 35
32. Bernard Rudofsky, 'The Bread of Architecture.' *Arts & Architecture*, Vol.69, No.10 (Oct. 1952), 28
33. Bernard Rudofsky, 'Before the Architects.' *Design Quarterly*, No.118/119 (1982) 61; The same idea reappears Bernard Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 186
34. Rudofsky, 'L'architettura comincia con un pavimento,' in: *Domus* no. 122 (February 1938), 1
35. Paul Emmons, *Drawing Imagining Building: Embodiment in Architectural design Practices*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2019), Ch.1. 'Footprint Plans,' 21-47
36. Emmons observes: "The close relationship between plan and earth is shown through practices of inscribing the plan at full-scale onto a site." Ibid., 29
37. Ibid., Ch.1. 'Footprint Plans,' 21-47
38. Rudofsky, "Variazioni," 15
39. Rudofsky, "Before the Architects," 61
40. Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, 5
41. Rudofsky, 'Non ci vuole un nuovo modo di costruire, ci vuole un nuovo modo di vivere,' in: *Domus*, Issue 123 (March 1938), 5
42. Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builders. Notes towards a Natural*

- History of Architecture*. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 102-107
44. Octavio Paz, 'This Side.' The poem can be found online: <https://www.poetryverse.com/octavio-paz-poems/this-side>
 45. Front matter to Bernard Rudofsky, *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat: Notes and Footnotes on the Lost Art of Living* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980)
 46. Pliny the Younger, "LII Letter to Domitius Apollinaris," <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pliny-letters.asp#GenPart%20VII>
 47. Rudofsky, "Non ci vuole un nuovo modo di costruire, ci vuole un nuovo modo di vivere," in: *Domus*, Issue 272 (July-August 1952), 6
 48. Ibid., 6.
 49. Rudofsky, 'Giardino, stanza all'aperto,' *Domus* Issue 123 (March 1938), 71
 50. Rudofsky, 'Non ci vuole un nuovo modo di costruire, ci vuole un nuovo modo di vivere,' *Domus*, Issue 272, (July-August 1952), 8
 51. Ugo Rossi makes this observation in his analysis of the Procida house in Ugo Rossi, *Bernard Rudofsky Architetto* (Napoli: Clean Edizioni, 2016), 76
 52. Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, chapter 'Our indecorous bathroom'
 53. Rudofsky, *Streets for People*, 15
 54. Ibid., 21
 55. Hashim Sarkis, *Biennale Architettura 2021: How Will We Live Together?* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2021)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ERIKA BRANDL is architect and a PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Bergen, Norway

MARGARET CRAWFORD is professor History and Theory of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

STELLA EVANGELIDOU is architect and Adjunct Faculty Member at Frederick University, Limasol, Cyprus

SAUL FISHER is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Associate Provost at Mercy University, Dobbs Ferry, NY, USA

KENNETH FRAMPTON is em.Professor of Architectural History at Columbia University, New York, USA

ANDREEA MIHALACHE is Assistant Professor at Clemson School of Architecture, Clemson, SC, USA

CHANTAL MOUFFE is em.Professor of Political Theory at the University of Westminster, London, UK

ESTHER LORENZ is architect and Associate Professor of Architecture at the School of Architecture, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

HANS TEERDS is architect and urban designer and works as Senior Lecturer at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zurich, Switzerland

MARGIT VAN SCHAİK is architect at Baltussen - Van Schaik, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

SVEN-OLOV WALLENSTEIN is Professor of Philosophy at Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden

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