

# PUBLIC SPACE: FIGHTS AND FICTIONS

AN EDITORIAL PROJECT BY THE FUNAMBULIST AND NEW SOUTH  
COMMISSIONED BY THE AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE AND THE GOETHE-INSTITUT



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# PREFACE

## CURATORIAL BOARD FIGHTS AND FICTIONS (BERLIN)

Joachim Bernauer & Andrea Zell, Goethe-Institut  
Johannes Odenthal & Nicola Beissner, Akademie der Künste  
Julia Albani & Joanne Pouzenc, BUREAU N

"Here is what we have to offer you... confusion guided by a clear sense of purpose."  
– Gordon Matta-Clark

Public space is an object of high hopes; the place where the future is to be negotiated. The content of the Goethe-Institut and Akademie der Künste's cultural programmes provides clear evidence of how passionately this topic is currently being discussed the world over: remarkable platforms of exchange have been created, bringing together international players in architecture, politics, the arts and culture, with local initiatives. The issues at stake are the right to public space and the citizen as political stakeholder. This requires participation: for citizens to play an active role in shaping their societies.

The ambitious 36-hour Factory of Thought: PUBLIC SPACE: FIGHTS AND FICTIONS was a litmus test for this international network. Shared euphoria was accompanied by the insight that real potentials for intervention vary to the same extent as the multitude of geographical locations where new approaches are being tested, and which are always dependent upon the specific political conditions in each context. The daily revolution must look different everywhere. However, what the 36-hour Factory of Thought showed is that local experiences and considerations can enter into exchange with one another through international networks and platforms, and remain dynamic.

We are calling for nothing less than a new science of democratic space. In the context of reform bottlenecks in education, cultural institutions, social and political cultures, the decisions that can effect change are increasingly being taken in public space. Through actions in public space or its occupation – particularly in cit-

ies – the fault lines become evident: between state and fiscal powers on the one hand and civil society movements on the other, between suppression and liberation, injustice and stakeholding. It is in public space that decisions are made between dictatorship and revolt, capital and participation.

Our concern is to support and develop interfaces between bottom-up and top-down structures. These 'in-betweens' are an expression of the complexity that has become a benchmark of forward-thinking visions. In this context, the exclusion of activists, artists and scholars from stakeholding in capital and political responsibility is a crisis phenomenon of our day. The euphoria seen in diverse movements in Tunis, Cairo or Istanbul, and equally in New York, Madrid and Berlin, is a driving force for political change, though – as yet – seems to lack the power to bring about change in political structures.

Public space is increasingly militarised: state mechanisms of surveillance, security, and defence against terrorism pose as great a threat as the insidious occupation of public space by international financial capital, which increasingly resembles the military interventions on fortress-like borders between Israel and the Palestinian territories, the USA and Mexico, and southern Europe and North Africa. We are witnessing a process whereby the borders between North and South are shifting toward the West's metropolises. These urban spaces mirror developments in Asia, Africa or Latin America, to the extent that, rather than public space solely expressing a measure of democratic quality of life, it also makes visible substantial and structural relations of power.

PUBLIC SPACE: FIGHTS AND FICTIONS is an attempt to sketch this field, describing and reflecting on these deeply embedded power structures. Policies of exclusion rooted in colonial and racist social histories, or the marginalisation of other forms of 'difference,' have destroyed public space or endanger it. This is the reason we shall spare no efforts in revitalising the Enlightenment project, with the goal of lending it a new force and strength.

Submerged by data-flows and contradictions, it is more important than ever to produce and perpetuate knowledge. There is an urgent need for new techniques for reflection and dialogue, negotiation and learning, and the transformation of information into critical content. While claiming to break ground for new ideas and new audiences, we often find ourselves stuck in a loop of repeating the same models. With the 36-hour Factory of Thought: PUBLIC SPACE: FIGHTS AND FICTIONS we tried to identify new and fruitful gaps in our thinking processes and experiment with different formats of exchange.

Fiction is the greatest force. The generous spaces of the Akademie der Künste building in Berlin, arranged and dressed in its best for the occasion by the Kooperative für Gestaltungspolitik, enabled a multitude of diverse encounters in multiple formats, as we found ourselves around tables, on stage, at the bar, in the gangways or nestled in the salon, with the common goal of generating thought. The result was overwhelming. Thanks to all the participants, whether invited speakers from around the globe, critical observers and journalists engaging the guests in a loop of interview sessions, or the mingling local audiences, the Factory was a unique testing ground, driven by the core question: "How can a critical public sphere shape public space

for the future, as a democratic platform of political and social dispute and dialogue?"

The present publication, made possible thanks to the combined critical approach of The Funambulist and New South editorial team, is not intended to archive the thought produced. Instead, we hope it will offer a productive link to continue the reflections launched in Berlin at a time of violent changes and fundamental global paradigm shifts.

*Translated from German by Andrew Boreham.*

**PUBLIC SPACE. FIGHTS AND FICTIONS was a conference organised jointly by the Goethe-Institut and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.**

# INTRODUCTION

## THE FUNAMBULIST & NEW SOUTH (PARIS)

“Who do we exclude from our fictions?  
Who do we include in our desires?”  
– Tentative Collective

Architects appear to be getting increasingly interested in the politics of public space. The 36-hour Factory of Thought event at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin is therefore inscribed within a larger movement towards social awareness as a key value in architecture practice. Regardless of its successes or failures, the 15th edition of the Venice Biennale *Reporting from the Front*, curated by Alejandro Arevena, provides the latest solid evidence of this move. Although such a shift – in both practice and the questions encountered by architects – can only be positive, what is too often missing from the conversation is the crucial need to question the very nature of public space itself: not only the way it is made and used, but the broader societal vision that it represents and reinforces. A useful starting point, then, is to examine what we mean when we say ‘public’, before we move on to analysis of ‘space’, the material that as architects, urban planners and spatial practitioners, we may dissect more comfortably.

Who is the public? The temptation is to take its conventional definition at face value: ‘public’ means open to all, inclusive, democratic, shared, a right. However, what emerges upon closer examination of specific cases is that these apparently universal values come with rules attached. The label ‘public’, when deployed across different contexts, can therefore obscure fissures that exclude certain individuals and groups, or that place constraints on their belonging to a common ideal. As such, ‘public’ reproduces a hierarchy of belonging and a dominant idea of ‘the public’ that eclipses a multiplicity of diverse minor ‘publics’. Behind these symptoms of inequality lie the structural mechanisms of the norm. Bod-

ies that share a majority of characteristics with the local norm are those perceived primarily as constituents in this notion of the ‘public’. On the contrary, bodies that do not conform to the norm, be it on the basis of their gender, their race, their health, their age or, more generally, their behaviour, are excluded from this notion to an extent proportionate with their degree of non-conformity. Consequently, the ‘space’ of the ‘public’ will also be proportionally less appropriate for those non-conforming bodies.

Let us be clear: this is not a problem of a lack of tolerance or inclusivity. In her interview transcribed here, as well as persistent and patient contributions throughout the event in Berlin, Nana Adusei-Poku addresses the simple but devastating point that ‘tolerance’ of people of colour, the queer community, Muslims and other marginalised groups in European and American public space is experienced by those individuals themselves as the mere postponement of a negative and violent rejection. Tolerance for – and what are conceived as ‘good intentions’ toward – others, from normative bodies toward whom public space is calibrated, only constitutes a patronising testimony to this inequality. Architects and designers are too often the deliverers of such a testimony. Before hoping to contribute to better, more ‘participative’ forms of public space, we must deconstruct this notion and its contradictions. This is the aim of the present publication; it can be seen as a theoretical toolbox oriented toward spatial practitioners and others engaged in the physical modification of the commons.

The other contributions curated for this present publication also engage with these processes of deconstruction.

Ana Dana Beroš addresses the segregation of public space in her close analysis of the infrastructure for receiving displaced persons in the so-called ‘humanitarian corridor’ in the Balkans, and particularly in Croatia and Slovenia. The fast paced evolution of the refugee situation, and the political adaptations and improvisations that seek to address it, throw into relief many assumptions and underlying tensions within European societies and the way that these are articulated in the public sphere.

With a recalibrated awareness of the power of ‘public’ to exclude and obscure its own hierarchisation, we can begin to develop a more nuanced understanding that admits the possibility of public space not only as a facilitator of conflict and negotiation, but also as being made by them.

Omar Nagati insists on this characteristic of the public, drawing on his experience of the immediate aftermath of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Here, a new set of rules to govern the public sphere needed to be constantly improvised, negotiated and renegotiated, throwing into relief – through the shock of their absence – the integrity of the state and a shared understanding of constraints in ‘normal’ circumstances. Omar’s experience of an absent State in post-revolution Cairo also provides the basis for his critique of the tendency, particularly amongst architects, to reject another key aspect of the definition of ‘public’, namely as it relates to government as opposed to private interests.

We wonder ‘for whom’ public space is designed, but also ‘against whom.’ In her contributed essay, Anna Minton discusses the current proliferation of privately owned public spaces in the UK. These selective spaces have ushered in the phenomenon of private security companies that police the bodies that use them, where the nature of ‘policing’ demonstrates an ambiguity in the identification of prohibited behaviours: merely unlawful ones, or also those that do not produce capital? Anna places her observations within the context of an increasingly militaristic and hostile attitude towards the public on the part of the political and business classes in the UK.

For spatial practitioners Alon Schwabe and Daniel Fernández Pascual of Cooking Sections, the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ no longer function and need to be supplemented with new terms

that capture the nuances of the dynamic and mutating situations we now find ourselves in. Cooking Sections aim to explore these themes through their work, opening up the field of possible constituents of the public to include insects, plants and climatic phenomena, both as active stakeholders and in terms of the way they demand and influence negotiation and engagement in the public sphere.

This publication compiles what we consider to be a cross section of the key themes to emerge from 36 hours of intense discussions, performances, key-note lectures, parties and interviews. It is not a report on the event *per se* but a specific and situated regard derived from our own participation as critical observers. Neither is it a collection aiming at a universalist reading of public space; we know all too well that universality often masks an exclusionary Western hegemony. On the contrary, it attempts to learn from the specificity of each context within which each of these contributions are formulated.

The publication includes six interviews conducted during the event with Eyal Weizman, Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe of Cooking Sections, Nana Adusei-Poku, Pedro Gadanho, Ana Dana Beroš and Omar Nagati. In addition, we present a selection of articles that provide a response to the themes raised, by Anna Minton, and Mona Fawaz and Ahmad Gharbieh, as well as texts by Elpida Karaba, Tentative Collective, Wilfried Wang and Kathrin Röggl that were integral to their presentations at the event itself. Our hope is that this editorial approach can be used as a framework for debate around the question of public space, the remit of which should not be constrained to the field of professional architecture but integrate and impact upon the broader social contexts within which we operate.

THE 36-HOUR FACTORY OF THOUGHT  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY IVAR VEERMÄE



(1) Denkraum (roundtable) 'Public Space as Militarised Environment', with Marvi Mazhar, Nana Adusei-Poku, representatives of #Archi-Debout, and Léopold Lambert. (2) The audience remained focused and engaged even when the Denkraum ended at midnight. (3) Keynote lecture in the Akademie der Künste auditorium / All photographs by Ivar Veermäe.



(1&2) Representatives of #ArchiDebout constructing a dome in front of the Akademie der Künste. (3) At night, the 36-hour Factory of Thought continues with several DJ sets and encounters between participants and Berlin party-goers. / All photographs by Ivar Veermäe.

**Wilfried Wang is the curator of the exhibition DEMO:POLIS: The Right to Public Space, displayed at the Akademie der Künste from 12 March to 29 May 2016. The 36-hour Factory of Thought was organized in parallel with this exhibition.**

Welcome to Berlin. Welcome to our innocent island of chloroformed wellness.

Visitors to the city always fall for its superficial relaxedness. They are amazed by the low density of crowds in the streets. They love the sense of openness towards people of different backgrounds, the carefree casualness of creative hipsters. What a contrast to the hectic bustle in London, Paris, New York, Shanghai, Istanbul and Moscow...

However, this superficial relaxedness masks fundamental fractures within German society and politics that come to the fore in public space. To give two examples:

First, the now weekly anti-Muslim demonstrations, particularly in eastern Germany. The so-called PEGIDA movement of Patriotic Europeans against the Islamification of the Occident is in the process of fusing with the extreme right-wing party of Alternative for Germany (AfD). The fissures that these movements have caused in the German political landscape are well documented, with the AfD currently standing at 13 percent in the polls, largely at the expense of the two mainstream governmental parties of the Conservatives and so-called Social Democrats, who now command a 50 percent approval rating compared with a combined 67.2 percent at the last election.

Second, and at the other end of the scale, the

former airport of Tempelhof with its 380 hectares of open space. The airport was closed in 2008 and Berlin's air traffic concentrated to the new BER in Schönefeld, under construction since 2006 and originally due to open in 2012. Its initial projected budget stood at 1,7 billion euros, currently stands at 6,9 billion, and no one is willing to guarantee an opening date.

The Berlin Senate's proposal for the construction of offices, housing and sports facilities on the perimeter of the former Tempelhof airfield was turned down by Berlin's voters by 64 to 35 percent in a plebiscite held exactly two years ago. But, far from this humiliation causing irreparable damage to his political career, the senator in charge of the failed project, Michael Müller, is the current mayor of Berlin. In February this year the mayor and his conservative coalition partners exploited the refugee crisis to claim the need for accommodation for up to 7000 people on and beyond the taxiways of the former airport. It was essentially a political takeover of the site, an act of revenge vis-à-vis the voting public and a foot-in-the-door to the political control of Tempelhofer Feld.

Ignoring the advice of Berlin's Refugee Council, who have always argued for decentralized accommodation of refugees to improve the chances of their integration within existing populated areas, the city's parliament voted to site greenhouses on the taxiways, two of which were erected in haste.

However, these greenhouses were recently inspected by the Berlin Refugee Council, and found unfit for habitation. The greenhouses get too hot in summer, as they have no opening windows; they get too cold in winter, given that they do not have any heating or floor; they have

neither electricity, water nor sewerage; but other than that – to paraphrase Norman Schwarzkopf – they are ideal for the accommodation of plants.

Beside the lack of foresight regarding the reuse of the former Tempelhof airport building and its airfield; beside the Senate's inability to complete the BER airport; the fight over the Tempelhofer Feld is indicative of the Senate's organizational ineptitude, moral bankruptcy and lack of democratic sensibilities.

For this reason, the original initiators of the 2014 plebiscite have started another campaign to hold a further plebiscite that would establish protection for the results of future plebiscites, essentially forcing lawmakers to hold an additional plebiscite in the event of proposed changes to a policy that was subject to a previous public vote.

The bottom-up initiative of the Tempelhofer Feld is one example, the largest citizens' action group, included in the exhibition DEMO:POLIS: The Right to Public Space. The exhibition showed how the meaning of physical public space has changed in the light of internet based surveillance and, as such, how public space has been revalued as a primary medium for political struggles. It suggests that the way artists use public space to exhibit their work is an indicator of a given society's freedom of expression. It explores a range of design approaches: from doing nothing at all, to the creation of a subtle background, or the design of entire landscapes for the safeguard of vulnerable coastal environments. It celebrates the successes of citizens' action groups from across the world that have achieved the goal of reclaiming public space for the public: from Puerto Rico to Madrid, from Ljubljana to Dublin, and from Mexico City to Berlin. The exhibition showcases work by young artists

and students providing radical visions for the improvement of specific situations and sites.

Our goal in creating this exhibition was to encourage the public to engage in the design of public space, to lay the foundations for the participatory design of cities: hence the title DEMO:POLIS. Moreover, we wanted to reassert that we have a right to public space; that we need to protect these key freedoms from fear of surveillance of speech or movement; that physical public space and our political actions in it are more important than ever; and, that practical participatory models for the definition of public space do exist and can serve as inspiration for future projects.

In October 1969, the former mayor of Berlin and newly elected chancellor of West Germany made a pledge that was also aimed at assuaging the angry generation of 1968: "We want to try to be more democratic." It is a pledge to which we not only feel morally obliged, but which motivated us during our work on this exhibition. Once again, nearly 50 years after Willy Brandt's declaration, we must become more democratic, and we must do so with the aim of overcoming the socially divisive effects of neoliberalist ideology, the unchecked power of international corporations, national security agencies and secret services.

We are not living on an island; things are not well at all. We must stop deluding ourselves that we live our lives in complete freedom. The erosion of our freedoms in our public spaces has been gradual and visible. This exhibition shows that we can – and must – restate our freedoms in public space and our rights to public space.

# REVOLUTIONARY ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICES

## CONVERSATION WITH EYAL WEIZMAN (LONDON + JERUSALEM)

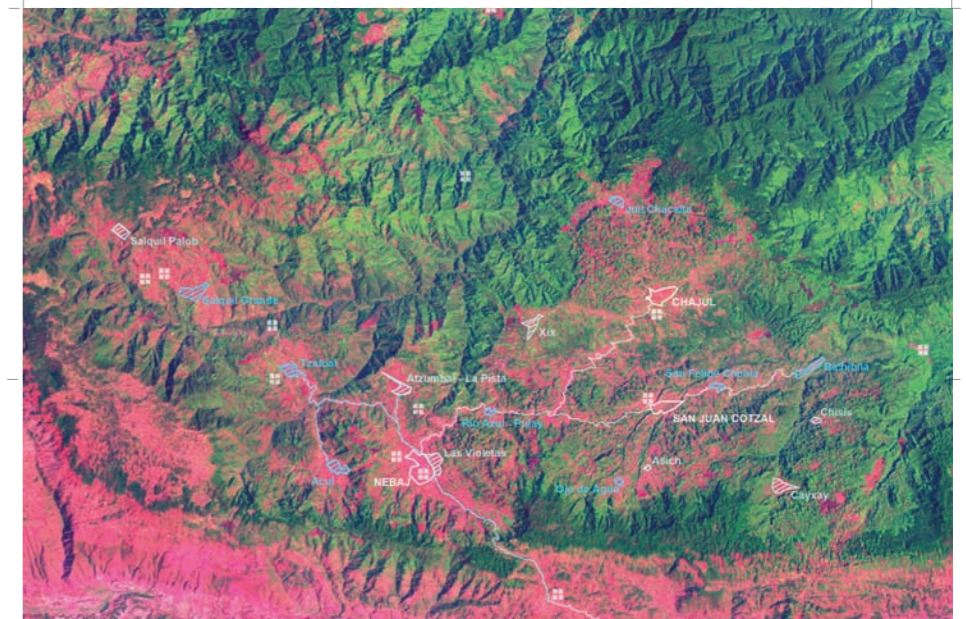
**Architect Eyal Weizman is Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures, and Director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is a founding member of the architectural collective DAAR in Beit Sa-hour/Palestine. He has published widely, and his books include *Mengele's Skull* (with Thomas Keenan; Sternberg Press, 2012), *Forensic Architecture* (dOCUMENTA13 notebook, 2012), *The Least of all Possible Evils* (Notte-tempo 2009, Verso 2011), *Hollow Land* (Verso, 2007), *A Civilian Occupation* (Verso, 2003), the series *Territories 1, 2 and 3*, and *Yellow Rhythms*. Here, in conversation with Ethel Baraona Pohl, co-founder of dpr-barcelona, Eyal discusses his interest in the history and political potential of the roundabout, the importance of auto-critique, as well as drawing on a number of his projects with Forensic Architecture to reflect on the role of algorithms, new military technologies and plants in the production of public space's fights and fictions.**

**Ethel Baraona Pohl:** You gave the opening lecture at the 36-hour Factory of Thought; in order to expand its contents, perhaps we could talk about your book, *The Roundabout Revolutions* (Sternberg Press, 2015). Could you tell us how it relates to this topic of the politics of public space?

**Eyal Weizman:** In this book I was trying to write two simultaneous histories, or rather, an entangled history: the history of the roundabout as an instrument of flow management – the invention of traffic – and the political history of the roundabout. In a sense I was looking at the roundabout as the 20th century answer to a problem raised by the 19th century. The Hausmannian city, which was the model for many other urban developments, accelerated movement through otherwise very chaotic, dense and non-linear urban fabric. At the beginning of the

20th century when cars began moving along these routes, there was a problem that emerged at the intersection. The problem of the intersection, of the roundabout, seems like a normal problem of flow management, but it is also an embodiment of the ideas of liberalism at the time, and this is really where the book begins. The philosophy of liberalism seeks to define self-governance and self-organisation as the preferable system for the flow of finance and political organisation, and in a strange way this is translated into traffic law. The apparatus of the roundabout is really like a diagram of liberalism, because it replaces the State at the intersection. The problem of the intersection brings the State to a crossroads, both literally and figuratively. At some intersections in Europe you would have up to 18 policemen trying to manage traffic, until they realise: "No, in fact, movement can self-organise." This is enabled through an apparatus that is both physical – a circle – and a system of regulated movement that allows people to move around, to self-correct, etc. In retelling that story, I was interested in looking at a political conception that traffic engineers already had, but that had to be unearthed. One of the main principles of liberalism is that, in order to produce these kinds of systems of self-control, of self-governance, you need to produce a subject that can self-govern.

**EBP:** Talking about self-governance, you include a very interesting quote by G.D.H Cole who says that, in order to create self-governance, we don't only need to create the activity of the participants, but the spaces for it to happen. I'm connecting this with your lecture, in which you described the separation walls in Palestine as the most active public spaces, though these walls are not built by architects. What do you think about this contradiction? What is the role of the architect, or what can it be? How can architects negotiate with these powers in order to engage with this self-governance?



(1) Eyal Weizman delivering his opening lecture at the 36-hour Factory of Thought, 19 May 2016 / Photograph by Ivar Veermäe. (2) *The Roundabout Revolutions* folly in Gwangju, South Korea designed by Eyal Weizman / Courtesy of Sternberg Press. (3) Counter-forensic map as part of the dossier "Guatemala Operacion Sofia - Environmental violence and genocide in the Ixil Triangle" by Forensic Architecture.



**EW:** When you think about an apparatus, you must think twice about a given physical form: you think about the subject that has to be produced in order to use it and you think about the technology of movement. In the case of cars it is their size, their turning radius and so on. But the book about the roundabout was looking at the moment of that apparatus' failure: when an apparatus that seeks to regulate flow becomes hijacked, and becomes the locus for the undoing of political regimes. I asked myself: "Why did some of the defining recent revolutions actually take place on roundabouts. What is it about the roundabout that invited them to do that?" To try to summarise a long and complex argument, when you design a square in a city, you design a place for people to congregate. When you design a roundabout, you design a place that people should never access. Taking it over is a way of putting the city under siege. If we think of the medieval siege as something that envelopes and surrounds, the idea is that by taking over the roundabout, you can paralyse a city through one single point. Then there is the migration of the roundabout to the colonial world as an instrument of civilisation, to civilise native people effectively, and how that became the moment of undoing for so many regimes. The book exists between these paradoxes, but the wall could be thought about in a similar way. It is the public square of many activists, and movements of civil disobedience and civil action against the occupation. The public square where it happens is divided, physically cut in half. But that is still the space where the congregation takes place, precisely because it undoes that act of division.

**EBP:** Based on this, can we conclude that we don't need architects to design this space of emancipation for revolutions to happen?

**EW:** We need architects in order to understand. Maybe not architects themselves but an architectural sensibility, to understand how a city can be put under siege by taking one point in it, at the centre rather than the periphery. Network thinking allows you to understand that taking over a node can paralyse a network. It might not be done by architects, but it is an architectural act, an understanding of the relation between urban form, urban behaviour and urban processes.

**EBP:** Revolutions and insurrections are based on the spirit of disruption: they don't follow rules. In the book, and in your lecture, you talked about how architects can create or intervene in these spaces.

Isn't it a contradiction to design something for an act that is based on disruption? Can we design disruption?

**EW:** No, we can never design the roundabout that would make the revolution. What was interesting in the installation I designed for Gwangju in South Korea, as part of a project curated by Nikolaus Hirsch, was that he had conceptualised that set of interventions as follies. A folly is traditionally a kind of building without a program, but I saw the folly, rather than a building without a function, as the interruption of function. In no way did we design a roundabout; we merely provided the means to take back the space from which we are usually excluded. If you have been to one of the many cities in the Arab world, you know that there are roundabouts everywhere and sometimes they are the only green spaces in a city. They are green spaces that cannot be entered because there is a wall of speed that cuts you away from that area. By taking it over, you enter a space from which you have been excluded. In this space, you do not construct, you interrupt. In Gwangju there was a crossroads and the circumferences of the *Revolutionary Roundabout* were drawn on it in the same black tone that the road has when it's raining: a wet road is darker than a dry road. In Gwangju there are two hundred and fifty days of rain a year: it is one of the rainiest towns that exist! When it is wet, the circles cannot be seen. Only as the city slowly dries, they emerge and interrupt the square on which they were superimposed. Frankly I don't know how they even allowed me to do the project because at some point I was worried that it was going to be a hazard! All of a sudden you have a roundabout that emerges from the square and people start driving on it in a very different way.

**EBP:** You were talking about another topic in your talk: chaos as a tool for control, but chaos can also be a tool for empowerment. Could you talk about how we can transform the use of chaos, from governments' use of it to control us to how we, as citizens, can use chaos to act against that control?

**EW:** There is a very interesting discussion in Arendt's book on Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. This is what brought about the antagonism towards her, as a result of which she was not allowed in Israel any more. She accused the Organised Jewish Council, the Judenraete, of managing their own destruction. She said that whenever the Nazis took control of and occupied a particular Jewish town, they would take the Jewish leadership and say: "To

improve the situation for your people, you need to keep the order. Report the names to us." They always argued that it was to improve the situation in whatever way they could for the Jewish people. Arendt showed that whenever people were not governed effectively, though they were also the victims, more people survived. Whenever there was chaos, totalitarian government could not deal with it. It could only achieve its goals by imposing its order all the way down. Now here is a question: our work evolved in the struggle of Israel-Palestine. There are so many NGOs that give food, and human rights NGOs that come and report, and NGOs who deliver medicine and so on. They become, in fact, an instrument of government in those places. They think that they are helping, but effectively they become an extension of political power. It is the art of being ungoverned that is so important. It is when order is imposed on you that you need to answer with chaos.

But when chaos becomes the mode of governing, the whole situation becomes more complicated. You cannot answer chaos with chaos, and I think this is really where architects could be at their best because you cannot operate by a rule in every situation. You need to measure every situation tactically and to understand whether this particular thing you do at this moment contributes or becomes complicit or counter-productive. Now the beautiful thing about politics is, if you don't want to take the risk of becoming complicit, you have no effect on the ground. The closer you are to becoming complicit with power, the more effective you can be. That line is very, very thin and needs to be measured. You always need to be critical of your own actions and you always need to understand that you don't work within any given parameters. You always have to measure your own actions in a particular situation, and I think this is where we need to combine a critical culture with a projective and proactive one through a notion of auto-critique. Maoists understand this very well because auto-critique is a Maoist term. This is the difference between Trotskyites and Maoists, at least within our field of resistance. Maoists operate in small cells through the concept of autonomy, so need the concept of auto-critique and understand that critical culture means nothing toward the outside. When I am an activist now in Israel-Palestine or anywhere else, I do not critique the Israeli Government. I do not give a damn to critique them, to do an ideological critique of them, when all of their crimes are just written out there. We need to confront them. Critique we need to reserve to our

own and this is about measuring the line between complicity and agency.

**EBP:** On the subject of urban forms and understanding how the city works, I wanted to make the connection to some of your other projects. I was thinking in particular about the investigative work that you did with Forensic Architecture, investigating U.S. and Israeli drone strikes. What does it mean for people to live under the constant shadow of a drone? What differences in behaviour become apparent when compared to public behaviours in more secure countries where people are not targeted, and what kinds of representations around public space emerge in these places where drone strikes are prevalent?

**EW:** The project emerged through an understanding that the kind of urban behaviour and urban patterns that emerge in cities like Mirali, Miramshah and Datta Khel in Waziristan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Area of Pakistan, are defined by American algorithms, even though Americans do not govern there. Through pattern analysis and signature strikes, the CIA executes people without knowing who they are. They target and assassinate people whose name they do not know, and they target them on the basis of patterns of behaviour in space. If three categories of behaviour intersect, that would incriminate you. Say, for example, you visit that mosque, and after visiting that mosque you go along that road and you make a phone call to one of these 15 numbers, that means you are a terrorist. You're dead. We have undertaken an enormous amount of research to try to figure out these algorithms, not because Forensic Architecture is trying to reckon with crimes of the past, but simply because if we understand the algorithms that govern violence in these urban spaces, we can intervene in urban space, and we can expose it. One of the things we noticed was that around 2009, targeted strikes and assassinations stopped being directed at cars moving between places and began to target people within the city centres. That is because the Taliban – but also other resistance groups in Pakistan – were figuring out the algorithm behind American strikes. They knew that if they drove by car, they were more vulnerable, and so started moving back into the city. When you do an analysis like that you must move radically between scales. Also around 2009, a new kind of ammunition was introduced, a missile called the Hellfire Romeo that was an architectural technology. Because the resistance was moving into buildings, and be-

cause most strikes had to happen in cities, the U.S. Army developed a bomb that was able to chase the target through various layers of floors and walls. What does that mean? Imagine you have a four-storey building. For a drone, it's the other way around: the first storey is always the top one. You program a delay fuse on the bomb, so that when it impacts, it does not blow up like any other; instead, it counts how many floors it passes through before blowing up in the targeted storey of the building. Simultaneously, we had to do a very large territorial and urban analysis, as well as understanding the micro-details of the munition, because the development of that specific rocket enabled the territorial proliferation of drone strikes. This is something we often do with Forensic Architecture; we try to connect macro and micro analyses. We look at the molecular level of architecture, of munitions or situations, and try to locate this micro level in a world in which these phenomena operate, or try to read out from their larger territorial, urban and architectural pattern.

**EBP:** I think that this is really connected with the topic of the 36-hour Factory of Thought, specifically with the topic of fiction. How do you investigate the manipulation of political rhetoric? How do you make visible the fictions that we have all read about in the mass media, and try to generate the counter point to that?

**EW:** First of all, when talking about fiction, one needs to look at algorithmic fiction. Pattern analysis in target and signature strikes is based on a fiction written by people somewhere in the Pentagon. It says that if you drive along this road and you call this number and your credit card is used to buy a specific product and so on, you are a terrorist whose imminent death is permitted. They have written an algorithmic fiction that starts to change cities. It is therefore necessary to look at what is happening in Miramshah based on that algorithmic fiction produced by the Pentagon, because every movement within the city is transformed by it. The algorithm, the hunter and the prey must continuously co-evolve; algorithms and urban behaviour exist within co-evolutionary loops. To understand architecture through fiction, one needs to understand what the algorithmic fictions are and how they operate as instruments of violence.

Then on another level, one must create one's own fiction. As you know, Forensic Architecture is now very much a detective agency. What we do is produce prosecution files, sometimes very dry docu-

ments that we produce for the prosecutor of a case. At other times – if we work for the U.N. or Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch or any of the large human rights or international law actors – they take other forms. Sometimes they take the form of advocacy, through video for instance. But in fact, the task of a forensic analyst is not to discover the truth, though this is always what I would say if I am in court! Our task is to convince. To convince and to convict.

**EBP:** Could we then say that you are creating more fictions?

**EW:** The task of the defence lawyer is to interrupt our argument. In interrupting our argument they try to call what we say a fiction. If they manage to convince that it is a fiction, it is a lost case. We have been involved in so many cases now that we can identify patterns in the approach they take. First they would say: "Hold on, when you submit something to the court you need to write the CV of everyone who worked with you." We have a lot of artists, we have film makers, we have architects, we have some theorists. We also have scientists and lawyers. But they always pick up on the ones with a creative background: "What does this mean, MFA [Master of Fine Art]? I mean, how do you submit a forensic report that includes a design by an artist? This is the total opposite of truth! This is not the Platonic idea of authenticity." This is one thing that they do and I'll tell you later how we confront it, but on many occasions, our reports were dismissed on that argument. Secondly, they would say: "But you're not neutral! We know you, you're an activist!" If it's in Palestine they would say: "You've been a member of the communist party. Who are you now to render so-called scientific, objective judgement on a particular situation?"

It's very important for me never to hide that fact that artists and architects were those people producing the evidence, because I think the aesthetic field is a field of investigation, a field of knowledge. I think that when so much of the evidence is now filmed and photographed – the user-generated material we find on social media – the people who should be looking at it are photographers and film-makers, and when so much of the violence is urban, the people that can read it are architects. When you make that argument, when you win that argument, you also open the door, because you try to make a particular case, convict a particular person or make a particular point, but you also try to create prec-

edents. That is how the law develops. The minute you have opened the door for a new kind of visibility, a new kind of product – films, computer models, etc. – you open the door for other things.

**EBP:** This reminds me: I studied architecture in Guatemala and nobody in the school talked about the genocide and Operation Sophia. When I discovered that this was one of the projects that you were researching with Forensic Architecture, I was pleased to see how the discussion could be brought into the architectural discourse. This happened in Guatemala, but nowadays I live in Barcelona where the government is against the approval of the historical memory law. There is always this fight between the citizens, the government and how we, as architects, can react to these cases.

**EW:** Well, you know Guatemala well enough to know that the Truth Commission, during the so-called transition to democracy in Guatemala, produced a historical document. It had statistics and a large amount of testimony, but it was completely oblivious to space. It did not understand the genocide of the Ishimaya people in the K'iche' region of the western highlands of Guatemala as an architectural project. When we were initially asked by Fredy Pecerelli from the FAFG [Fundacion De Antropologia Forense De Guatemala], and other organisations, to provide evidence in the trial of Ríos Montt – the former dictator who was finally convicted for genocide, but only for two days – we had a problem. There were about 400 villages of indigenous Ishi people that were completely destroyed, and when they were destroyed the forest grew over them. The ruins were 40 or 50 years old and the cloud forest accelerates the disintegration of any organic material, so what was left was an archaeology without material. All organic material had been consumed, eaten, and disappeared; all that was left were the plants. We began to look at the botanical archaeology of that conflict: the plants themselves, the trees, the vegetation that grew over the ruins of those villages, which contain information about the presence of the architecture that was there before them. Imagine that there is a village that has been destroyed: the forest grows, but the forest around it is second or third-growth forest. They are visually the same, you would not see any difference. But, although the trees look the same, we know that they sequester carbon in a different capacity. In that patch you have trees that take less carbon from the atmosphere. When we began to study the plants, we started to understand that what we were looking

at were forms in the forest. Within an apparently totally green and formless forest, a city began to appear. We saw circles where villages were, we began to see routes, and when we counted the distribution of edible plants, we began to see that they existed in higher density along those informal routes. All of a sudden, we had the painting, the plan emerging from the DNA of the plants themselves. As an architect, sometimes you need to be attuned to forms of human and natural entanglement and not necessarily just a broken wall with a bullet hole in it. Archaeology is being looked at in natural form; a very interesting thing. We are continuing this work and are in the process of submitting another set of cases for trial in Guatemala.

**EBP:** It is also a very difficult field in which to act because of corruption and the power of the political system. How do you deal with that?

**EW:** It's a mess! The field of international law is chaotic! People think of us as forensic specialists, but forensic specialists are mainly people who work for the police. All the protocols are clear: you find the evidence, you present it in court and you convict or you don't. The problem of counter forensics, which is what we do, is that we are citizens against the State; we are not a state institution. In fact the crimes that we look at are crimes of the State itself. We exist in a much more chaotic field. Usually there is no law, there are no courts. If there are, they are contingent and tactical and we can sometimes use them. But we might be chased away from them and need to find another approach. We operate in a field that is much harder to navigate, but that's the challenge, because we are not interested in being a policing force. In fact most of the work goes against the police. Forensics 101 – ever since Bertillon – is that the State must see in higher resolution, the State must know more than the criminal. That is how to get a conviction. Without that principle, the State doesn't get the conviction. Counter forensics is the opposite: the State will know more, but the State is the criminal. We always see less, we always have a lesser technology. This is why we need art, architecture and creativity to invert that differential of vision.

# DESIGNING 'FORTRESS BRITAIN'

ANNA MINTON (LONDON)

**Anna Minton is a writer, journalist and Reader in Architecture at the University of East London. She is the author of *Ground Control* (Penguin, 2009). A regular contributor to *The Guardian* newspaper, she writes about cities, housing, democracy and public space. In this essay, Anna expands on her contribution to the 36-hour *Factory of Thought*, providing an overview of the encroachment of Secured by Design in planning processes currently prevalent in the UK, as well as examples of approaches that could act as alternatives to the securitisation of public space.**

Not long ago I was invited to Manchester in the north of England, to take part in a coach tour of the city aimed at policy experts. As we swept into an estate in a deprived part of Manchester, the whole coach gasped and the tour guide exclaimed in shock. The square in the centre of the estate was surrounded by thirty-foot high spiked railings and the council building at one end resembled a militarised fortress.

This is a particularly extreme example but today all public buildings in the UK, including schools, hospitals and housing, come with high levels of security that are transforming the nature of the environment. At the same time, fear of crime and concerns about safety and security are at an all-time high, and although crime has been falling steadily since 1995, the vast majority believe the contrary. The reason for this is that high security is now a pre-requisite for planning permission for all new developments, as a result of the government-backed Secured by Design policy, aimed at public space and public buildings, from schools to hospitals. While the goal is to use design to create safer places, the outcome tends to be very high security environments that appear threatening. For example, a gated development in East

London – which won a Secured by Design award – was commended for its small windows, reinforced steel door with full size iron gate and grey aluminium military-style roof.

Because Secured by Design requirements are based on an audit of local crime risk, higher crime areas, which correlate with higher deprivation scores, are now characterised by public buildings like the council building in Manchester, that have a militarised feel. The unintended consequence is that fortress levels of security are now a visual marker for poor parts of Britain and a contemporary feature throughout the landscape. At the same time, the focus on technological solutions to increase safety has gone hand-in-hand with reduced investment in natural surveillance – Jane Jacobs' notion of 'eyes on the street' – with the disappearance of so-called 'guardianship figures'; individuals such as caretakers, park keepers and bus conductors.

The Secured by Design Schools Guidance document accepts that some of its recommendations can create a shocking visual marker, but claims this is offset by reducing crime risk. In high crime locations 'anti ram' bollards are recommended to protect entrances and the document includes 31 specific recommendations for all schools. These range from fencing, gates and security bollards to roller shutters and grilles, electronic locking systems, metal detectors and CCTV. There are estimated to be more than 100,000 CCTV cameras in UK schools, despite the lack of any compelling evidence that CCTV improves safety or reduces fear of crime. At St. Mary's CE high school, in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, for example, 162 cameras have been introduced, including 18 in the toilets. During an interview for a research project, the director of a company providing security fencing told me: "We started off doing things like



(1) Anna Minton in discussion at the 36-hour *Factory of Thought* / Photograph by Ivar Veermäe. (2) *Countryside Homes* in Salford, U.K. / Photograph by Anna Minton. (3) *Pharmacy* in Salford, U.K. / Photograph by Anna Minton. (4&5) *Nursery School Covolo* in Treviso, Italy, designed by C+S architects / Courtesy of Maria Alessandra Segantini.

prisons, airports... high security environments, and now we're increasingly doing more schools and multi-use games areas [playgrounds]."

The genesis of this approach, as with so much of public policy in the UK, began in the US a generation ago, with the publication of architect Oscar Newman's 1972 book, 'Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City.' Based on a study of crime on three New York public housing projects, the core of his argument was that crime, rife in such areas, was not the result of social problems but opportunism, and could therefore be dealt with through design. Conveniently, this would also be far simpler – and cheaper – than addressing the root causes of social and economic deprivation. His conclusion was that private territory and boundaries could be marked out, thereby deterring criminals from entering.

Newman's simplistic view, chiming with an increasingly individualistic political culture, spread like wildfire in US policy circles before arriving in Britain in the 1980s, where a niche but heavily contested debate developed between Newman's acolytes and those who argued that his approach was environmentally deterministic. The most significant impact of his influence was the development of Secured by Design, based on its US counterpart, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), which laid out guidelines for defending territory and 'designing out crime' that new developments must now meet in order to obtain planning permission.

Simultaneously, the UK has witnessed the roll-out of what criminologists Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning describe as 'mass private space', in the form of private, gated developments, conference centres, university campuses and large parts of the city that have morphed into privately owned open-air shopping malls, where streets and public spaces are owned by developers rather than democratically elected government. 'Mass private space' automatically brings with it high levels of private security, fitting seamlessly with the Secured by Design agenda. Since 9.11 concerns over terrorist threats have also fed into and fuelled this cocktail of factors.

This approach to planning, which privatises the ordinary citizen's right to the city and shrinks democratic space, is less prevalent in continental Europe but more common in the 'Atlanticist'

economies of North America, Australia and New Zealand, with the UK at the forefront. When I first started to research the privatisation of public space ten years ago, I was shocked to discover that privately owned estates, such as the financial districts at Canary Wharf and the Broadgate Centre had become the template for all new development in the UK. To take one example, Liverpool One covers 34 streets in the heart of Liverpool, all of which are privately owned and policed by uniformed private security who enforce strict rules and regulations on behaviour and access. In addition to roller blading, skateboarding, cycling, and even eating and drinking in some areas, these places also ban photography, filming and, critically, political protest, meaning that they are not democratic spaces. Ironically, even the headquarters of the Mayor of London, the Greater London Authority, is part of a privately owned estate called 'More London', and thus even democratically elected Assembly members are prohibited from conducting television interviews in front of their own building.

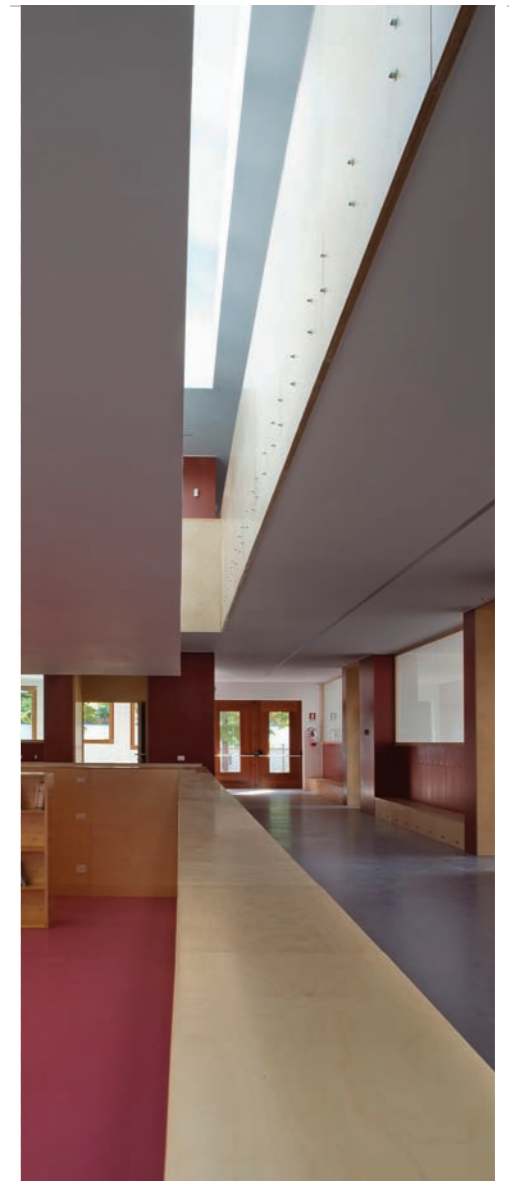
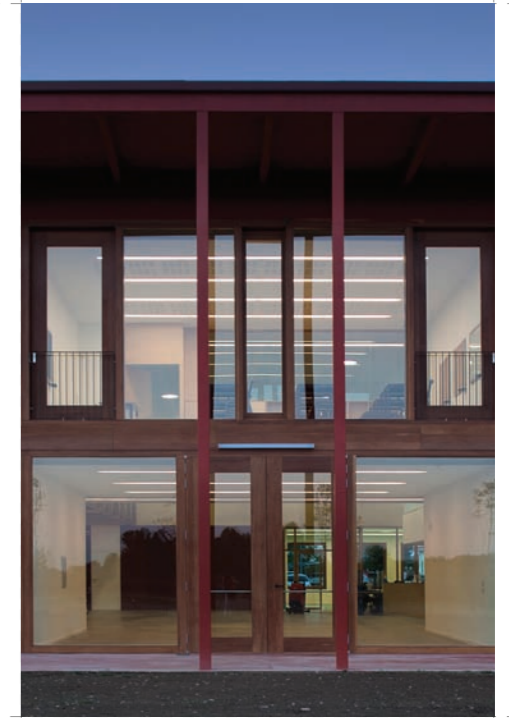
Advocates claim that London's beautiful and characteristic Georgian squares and terraces were built on a similar model by aristocratic landlords who controlled the 'great estates', such as the Duke of Westminster who owned large parts of Mayfair and Belgravia and the Duke of Bedford who owned Covent Garden. What they do not mention is that the great estates were closed to the general public, surrounded by high fences and railings and policed by security guards and sentry boxes during the 18th and early 19th centuries. However, as local government grew in power, paralleled by increased democratic representation that came with the widening of the franchise, large-scale public protest against the gating-off of such large parts of the city resulted in two parliamentary enquiries and, finally, the decision that councils rather than private landlords should control the streets. Since then, it has been customary for local authorities to 'adopt' streets and public spaces, to use the official terminology; this was a hard won democratic achievement that is now being reversed.

It is difficult to see how these trends can be challenged in the UK, where political uncertainty now runs in parallel to a growing lock-down of the urban environment. In contrast, some European architects work in exactly the opposite way, as showcased at this year's Venice Biennale. De-

spite the recent political turn away from Europe in the UK, the embedded international nature of university education in architecture ensures that my colleagues at the University of East London (UEL) continue to expose our students to very different influences. For example, Maria Segantini, an Italian architect and Reader in Architecture at UEL, was invited to the Biennale to exhibit the work of her practice on the role school buildings play at the centre of their communities – in direct contrast to the fortified school spaces being created in the UK.

The aim of Segantini's practice, C+S Architects, is to create public buildings for the public good, as laid out in their 'manifesto for the polis', which aspires "to give public space back to people who will take care of it rather than protecting it with walls or digital cameras." Acknowledging that, "20 years ago the topic was not one of the most glamorous for architects", the practice avoided 'starchitect' projects and consistently built nursery schools, primary schools and university spaces that open out to the community. By questioning conventional layouts they created shared and hybrid spaces for use after school hours, as well as a hospital and even a law court that function in the same way.

Despite the emphasis on high security architecture in the UK, it is possible to overcome the strictures of Secured by Design if there is a real commitment to do so. At the Bromley-by-Bow health centre in East London, which includes a large open space for community use, there are no security guards and anyone is free to come and go as they wish through the various entrances. Significantly, the health centre serves one of the most deprived communities in Britain in an area where most of its neighbouring public buildings are plastered in security. New Peabody Trust housing in South London is another example of how architects can avoid building gated developments. In this case, £20,000 had to be spent on a study to prove to Secured by Design officials that housing without gates in the area showed no higher incidences of crime, illustrating the commitment required. Though the trend in the UK is very much in the opposite direction, at UEL, Maria Segantini and I are in the process of setting up a Centre for Inclusive Architecture that we hope can give some encouragement to those trying to oppose the wave of securitisation that is sweeping across so much of the British landscape.



# WHO GETS TO BE 'THE PUBLIC'?

## CONVERSATION WITH NANA ADUSEI-POKU (ROTTERDAM)

**Nana Adusei-Poku is Research Professor in Cultural Diversity at Rotterdam University and a lecturer in Media Arts at the University of the Arts, Zurich. Following degrees in African studies and gender studies at Humboldt University and in media and communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London, her work as a scholarship doctoral student at Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, focused on the curatorial concept of 'post-black' in relation to contemporary Black artists. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana, Legon, the London School of Economics, and Columbia University, New York. Among her publications, she contributed "The Challenge to Conceptualise the Multiplicity of Multiplicities – Post-Black Art and Its Intricacies" to *Post-racial Imaginaries*, a special issue of *Dark Matter* in 2015. Here, in conversation with Léopold Lambert, editor of *The Funambulist*, and Meriem Chabani of New South, Nana discusses the thinkers who can provide frameworks for reassessing what we mean when we say 'public', the power of non-mixed spaces, and opacity as an alternative to the dominant narrative of tolerance.**

**Meriem Chabani:** Nana, we got to know you during this event through your probing questions to other participants, before having the pleasure of seeing your presentation. From the start you questioned the very definition of public: which public are we talking about and which public are we not talking about? We noticed that you struggled to get answers to these questions. That may have stemmed from a lack of identification – and also inability to identify the issues you raised. One of the points that you raised in your talk was about non-mixity, and its

potential to reveal the invisible within space. I would like to have your thoughts on that.

**Nana Adusei-Poku:** That's a beautiful question. Well, honestly it was from the top of my head when I mentioned non-mixity, but I also spoke about the history of how to create spaces where growth is possible for people who are dominated by conversations that are more violent to them than nurturing. In a way, white communities are really good at that, but most often out of xenophobia, ignorance and fear. When you think about gated communities or economically or financially privileged communities, they are good at gating themselves in, in order to have their own 'safe' space.

But then I reassess that in terms of space... I don't know, it was really a question from the top of my head, but there were examples that were mentioned afterwards. For instance, Brixton is a space where people live alongside one another very beautifully and where there is a lot of diversity. Diversity here for me means people from various Caribbean Islands, Nigerians, Ghanaians and many other ethnicities. Of course that has changed due to gentrification: Brixton has become very white. It is also historically not really the safest space, when you think about Electric Avenue where there were race-motivated bombings and so on. But that is white terror: the people who are affected by it are not considered protection worthy. We never talk about those kind of attacks and why those spaces are not shielded from them. We really have to talk about which bodies are more under threat and how: systemically, epistemologically, as well as physically. But I wouldn't really know how to put this into a spatial practice, which is of course what you want to look at!



(1) Nana Adusei-Poku at the 36-hour Factory of Thought / Photograph by Ivar Veermäe. (2) Black Lives Matter demonstration in New York City (November 2014) / Photograph by The All-Nite Images. (3) Black Lives Matter activists blockading a highway in Minneapolis, MN (December 2014) / Photograph by Fibonacci Blue.

**MC:** What I think is interesting about having you involved in talks that overwhelmingly involve architects or spatial practitioners is that though we're still talking about public space, there is a need for other actors to come into play. To go back to this idea of the invisible body, and those bodies that are the subject of the violence exercised: as you have mentioned, there are very different policies depending on the neighbourhood: the difference between how the police will act in the rich neighbourhoods of the capital and how it will act away from the cameras in much poorer neighbourhoods. My question would be: throughout your practice, have you seen similarities in different situations involving Black bodies, specifically? Can you provide some examples that you could piece together and help us draw a landscape of what the situation is?

**NAP:** Well, that's why I actually started my presentation with James Baldwin's *No Name In The Street*. You can find in his writing – also in *Nothing Personal* – several accounts in which he talks about being policed. He's standing on the street, on the wrong street corner, and he is questioned by the police, for instance. It really depends on where and who you are in the space, what the colour of your skin looks like, what type of clothes you are wearing, what kind of Gender presentation you have etc. If you read him, or if you look at work by Audre Lorde, there are incidents on the subway in New York, and it is very often that these instances of racialisation and exclusion are described in terms of public space. Ralph Ellison writes about being invisible, that people don't see him. There is a tension as a Black person between being either hyper-visible and a threat – particularly if you are more than one person – or invisible, overlooked, unseen.

I don't want to only talk about the police, because I think that the public, and the different bodies in the public with their different positions in society, are already a force of policing. Frantz Fanon sits on the train and a little child can become the embodiment of the hegemonic ideology that is prevalent in society and point out: "Look momma, a N." And I will not repeat that word of course. That was in Paris in the 1950s. You also have writings from Black Germans, Black British, Swedish or French who point at the same sort of pattern of being policed by

Whiteness due to one's physical otherness to Whiteness. I think that this is a very common phenomenon in the global north, that our bodies are constantly policed, framed, racialised, even touched. I remember as a teenager sitting on a bus and someone touching my hair from the back. These things can happen when you are an adult or a senior as well. The question is: whose subjectivity actually counts, whose voices are heard?

So, its not just the police. We had incidents of racial profiling here in Germany. There was – beautifully, I must say – a lot of resistance by Black German Activists. The Black community in Germany actually worked against this form of racial profiling. It was clear that the police were allowed, on the basis of your visual appearance, to stop you on the train and to ask you for your papers. But this form of racial profiling is also part of our everyday life. You go to a party in order to have a good, relaxing and recreational time, but most likely if you are at a white German event, you will be asked at least once where you are from as an introductory question. This example always causes great debate, because white denial in people will try to tell you this is a question of curiosity. I argue that it is a question that already polices your body. It says: "You are different, you don't belong, tell me an exotic story about yourself."

I think that the notion of hybridity has not arrived in Europe yet: Black and Brown people have been part of it from the beginning AND we are connected with the former Colonies. This historical amnesia produces a lot of violence that finds its forms in multiple expressions of hegemony. But to come back to your question about space, and a place where I am based now, Rotterdam is an extremely segregated city. My barber had just opened in a neighbourhood where there are not so many black people, however his clients are predominantly people of colour. There is so called loitering in front of the shop, but honestly, it seems to me that some things are supposed to happen on the street, some talking, catching up and so on. Its nice! My barber told me that in the street there is now a sign that says loitering is not allowed and the police are called regularly by the white neighbours, as soon as there are more than four young men, and they are predominantly of colour. So, as I said, the policing is not only done by the police

itself, but also by individual citizens. I also have to emphasise that these individuals are not only necessarily right wing; it comes from the middle class and it comes often from people who consider themselves liberal and 'open minded'. These are the worst to be honest: "I'm so terribly open, I don't see colour, I really try to treat everyone the same, but please don't move into my neighbourhood."

**MC:** From the examples you're giving, what strikes me is that the same patterns repeat all over the world: in the global North, in post-colonial countries. Of course the United States has a very specific history with a Black presence that comes predominantly from the history of slavery, while Europe's mainly post-colonial presence of Black bodies derives from its own historical trajectory. The issue is very often that European countries reject the very possibility of racism as a phenomenon or a systemic problem because they don't identify as post-slavery countries, despite their previous participation in the slave trade. We see examples – and probably one of the most extreme is in France – where you have this narrative of colour-blindness and Republican universality. One of the questions that was raised by Johannes Odenthal during your panel, the idea of Enlightenment, to me was arresting, because it brought to mind precisely these issues of universality, that despite being generally seen as very positive and constructive qualities, can actually be discriminatory and exclusive. I'm wondering how you deal with those issues in your work, and how you extract the multiplicity of identities?

**NAP:** I always used to hate 'Enlightenment' as a principle, but I liked the fact that Johannes said "We need a different form of Enlightenment and we need a different form of universalism." We also heard afterwards from Eva [Franch I Gilbert]: "Where are these alternative practices or alternative thoughts or ways of thinking?" Well that's exactly what I tried to address: they exist! Please, sit down and read Sylvia Wynter, please read Hortense Spillers, please engage with conversations around Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant. Read Black Studies Theorists, Queer of Colour Theory, Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. Look at artists who work around these issues, watch movies outside of Hollywood like Ousmane Sembembe. There is an entire body of work out there by Black voices, people of co-

lour and white alliances. And I forgot to mention the entire work around Orientalism. The problem is that the dominant Culture makes these voices exceptions and not part of the central debate. It is too dangerous, because it would deconstruct the Universalism and Humanism that people love to believe in and uncover them as intrinsically violent and dehumanising.

In my own work I'm really interested in notions of new humanism or alternative ways of thinking our existence, from Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter or Fred Moten. You can read them against each other very productively. I have become, not pessimistic, but I see a chance in rejecting the notion of the human at the moment. *Per se*. Because it doesn't work. It was a category that was so exclusive from the very beginning. Why not reject the notion that we need to talk about human-ness as common ground? We may have common basic needs, but even these differ. There is no normative body. That's where I'm at. I'm also interested in the possibility of embracing nothingness which Fred Moten wrote about, and to embrace the abyss that Glissant beautifully addresses. Frantz Fanon talks about being between nothingness and infinity. Édouard Glissant begins *The Poetics of Relation*, by describing the ontology of the post-colonial or enslaved subject as going into the open boat, going into the no-space, the no-time, the no-place, going into the womb, the womb abyss with so many alive and living under the conditions of death. He writes: "We don't know each other yet, but we will get to know each other." So that's where he's coming from, and you find that basically everywhere in Black Diasporic cultural production. Angela Davis, in her latest publication, utilises a freedom song that was sung during the twentieth-century freedom movement in the southern United States. It goes: "They say freedom is a constant struggle. O Lord, we've struggled so long, we must be free." Other lines end: "We've cried so long, we've moaned so long, we have died so long, we must be free". The notion, experience and presence of death is intrinsic for Black thought and for the Black experience. The more I understand and experience systemic oppression, the more hopelessness arises in response to the question of whether we will ever be free from violence.

I don't know where the journey goes, but I know that there is a lot of theory and activism

that is extremely productive for what we want to achieve. I am also saying this with caution, because I see a lot of toxic masculinity within these movements of thought and activism. The mere fact that the media predominantly report about Black Cis men getting killed is alarming; Black Cis Women and Trans lives seem not to matter. The hetero-patriarchy, which has been prevalent in the Black Liberation Movements and Independent Movements, seems to be taking over again. Or as in Europe, the planned ban on Muslim women wearing the clothes of their choice is again a political conversation that is negotiated on the female body, while what is actually being discussed is masculinity and power. These issues are intersectional, meaning various categories overlap, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. The rejection of the emotional part is one of the remnants of enlightenment itself, because feelings were either universalised or thought objectified; the objective stance where you can look at something and determine, name, classify, signify, evaluate what it is out of nowhere. What I saw today is that when you put salt into the wound of white neglect, there is an emotional reaction and that must be used productively. But I also have to say, it is not my responsibility as a Black person. When it comes to art and architecture it is important to realise that doing a project in a part of the world where your body has been the coloniser before, it is your responsibility to reflect yourself. Deeply. It's not the kind of responsibility associated with saying, "I want to help these people." No, help yourself, because you are suffering. There must be something so wrong. But I'm not in that body so I wouldn't know.

**Léopold Lambert:** Perhaps what you were just saying relates to the first question in terms of non-mixity because that's something that we've been talking about quite a lot recently in France. You were presenting with a group that is, I guess, a 'self-nominated' representative of Nuit Debout. There's been a group of feminists at Nuit Debout holding non-mixed commissions and we saw a ridiculous backlash from some of the men involved in Nuit Debout who were probably not much interested in attending the meetings but wanted to be *able* to. That's where the notion of power comes in, particularly in French with the notion of *pouvoir*. *Pouvoir* is the verb for 'be able to' and also the noun

for power. But even more drastically, we saw a small committee of people of colour at the Paris 8, the university in Saint Denis, heavily criticised for gathering between themselves when they organise events, even when the event itself, some of which I have attended, are open to all. Everything that you just said, and I think everything that you shared in your presentation, relates to the difference between decolonising and empowering. I think we could say that the conversation we are currently having in a mixed environment might very much be dedicated to decolonising, with the entire emotional work that is necessary and the incredible patience of which I'm so admiring, whereas those non-mixed groups allow very much the form of empowerment you were talking about. Would this be a way to come back to this question that Meriem asked you and that you perhaps had trouble spatialising?

**NAP:** Absolutely. I mean it's really the question, within these structures, of how to justify your segregation. One of the arguments is then very often, when we look at cities and how they are ordered and structured, that there are areas where you have larger Muslim communities and that is OK. That's also what I meant by opacity. These urban planners that think we have to disperse these communities, that we have to introduce some middle class young creatives – preferably heterosexual small families – into these areas, are really destroying cultivated social relationships and spaces of nurturing. Because when I spend time in these areas – and this is the reason that this kind of commoning of the public space is so dangerous – I find that they are spaces where I start to be able to breathe again, where I don't feel threatened by the people who surround me and very often the people who surround me in those spaces are of colour.

However, what is troubling is that these spaces where non-white communities are living are often underfunded, not well taken care of and in some areas have bad and exclusive infrastructures. That is where inequality and mistreatment happens. I nevertheless feel safer there than if I were somewhere else. I never go to Lichtenberg here, I don't like to go to Pankow. I mean, why is it that people of colour don't like to go to the countryside? Its very simple: you have to be afraid for your life sometimes, particularly in Germany in the east. I mean, there are always

people who downplay this, but even that sentiment has a history to it and it's one that is cultivated. Not to take that seriously is a technique of silencing and of giving those individuals who feel marginalised even more the feeling of not existing. You don't have a voice, you don't exist, you are nothing, you are not of importance, you are basically not a human. So then when we think of public space as a space of subjectification, are you even a subject, do you even exist? As Ralph Ellison writes: "People don't see me. It's not because of a peculiarity of their vision, but it's because of their minds."

**LL:** I'd like to conclude the conversation by returning to your presentation and your closing thoughts about opacity, introduced by the fantastic author Édouard Glissant, and how this could be the perfect word to oppose the idea of 'tolerance' that we hear about so often from, let's simply call it, the white left. Tolerance meaning: "I tolerate you, I give you the right to vaguely exist not too far from me but not too close." Could you explain a little more this concept of opacity through Édouard Glissant?

**NAP:** Well that's one of the misinterpretations I always see with Glissant, in terms of how he was so strongly borrowed from for developing the concept of multiculturalism and instrumentalised exactly into that idea: "Yes, we tolerate you there but as long as you stay where you belong." What I mean with that form of opacity is that to tolerate something means also to somehow disagree. There is a disagreement in tolerating. "I'm not OK with you, but it's OK." We all do this in arguments: "Yes, it's fine, m-hmm," when clearly it isn't fine. Or at least I do that! And then you start nagging, and the issue resurfaces again and again. This is exactly what is happening when tolerance is promoted as a key value or strategy in our societies. The urban space is organised in a way that the breaking point of tolerance always returns, because in the end, its actually not OK for the system that these people are there. I think that notion of opacity is one where you can also be fascinated and you can also share. I understand it as: "You don't understand. I don't understand you, but that is OK. I don't understand. Yes it's different, and the difference is fine and actually it's also enriching and I'm learning something from that." I think that is how I understand the notion of opacity: that I won't

be able to really assess everything. In philosophy we start with the premise: "I know that I don't know." That is so beautiful. It's a starting point that embraces the notion of growth and flux and exchange and curiosity without exoticism.

# OTHER SPACES: BEYOND PUBLIC & PRIVATE

## TENTATIVE COLLECTIVE (KARACHI)

**The Tentative Collective is a gathering of artists, curators, teachers, architects, and often collaborators from completely different backgrounds including fishermen, housewives and domestic workers, they are based in Karachi, Pakistan. Their work responds to the city site-specifically, and is interested in engaging with its peculiar co-opting of global modernity in the rapidly expanding age of the anthropocene; in particular, the precarious urban geographies of the city and the voids it opens for groups such as their own to inhabit. While navigating through these rapidly transforming urban environments, Tentative Collective hope to create poetic and ephemeral moments in conversation with the city's infrastructures, making connections to its complex ecological and geological histories. Presented here is the oration that Tentative Collective contributed to the Denkraum, 'The Symbolism of Public Space', at the 36 hour Factory of Thought.**

We have been invited to make a statement about the 'symbolism of public space,' but instead, we wish to start by asking a question: which publics?

Can we critique our own desires about what the 'public' signifies, and include within its rhetoric the exclusions of class, gender, race, temporalities of crisis, and the self-righteousness of utopias? Who do we exclude from our fictions? Who do we include in our desires?

Interior/exterior, inside/outside, public/private. In the age of the anthropocene, how can we think the city outside of binary categorizations and easily consumed terminologies?

Can we shift our lens slightly to look at the various commodifications of space that swallow these bi-

naries, and make the conversation about public versus private space appear a lot less urgent in comparison? How can we understand the city in its state of perpetual transformation through the active tenses of consumption, expansion and exhaustion? We stand at a precarious crossroads where making 'public' is often dangerously in sync with commodification and mass consumption.

Referring to the new horizons of capitalist expansion, Franco Bifo Berardi, the Italian philosopher, argues that: "Development is above all the conquest of internal space, the interior world, the space of the mind, of the soul, the space of time." If we understand 'public' as an opposition to 'private', what does it mean to be public when the private space of the mind, our interior world, has been sold? To imagine that we might be travelling mediums for bite size nuggets of pre-processed ideas is truly frightening.

In cities like Karachi where infrastructure can never catch up with need, often bypassing or encroaching on the lives of the less privileged, informal co-options of planned spaces for seemingly unplanned activities symbolise moments of resistance. The ingenuity in such moments of resistance implicate aesthetics; where the agency of publics that are not planned for, or that are planned out, is exerted as a kind of *jugaar* – or make-shift, cheap, vernacular aesthetic – upon forces and fictions of order.

Hence, categorical definitions of space often reveal their inadequacy when moving across contexts; there are so many problems with the rhetoric of public space that we need new tools and ways of talking about it. For example, we learned from the project *Mera Karachi Mobile Cinema* – executed in various parts of the city – that the



(1) Bashir Photographer's mobile photo studio at Seaview beach, Karachi. (2) Mera Karachi Mobile Cinema screening on a residential street in Ibrahim Haideri. (3) Four channel projection at a defunct water treatment plant, pumping untreated water/waste into the river Ravi, Lahore. (4&5) Mehreen Murtaza's screening as a part of Tentative Collective's, 'Projections'. / All photographs by Tentative Collective.



architecture of a typical 'unplanned' house in Karachi usually includes a space for public meeting; a transitory space; a space that is built with the expectation of personal display; a site of generosity to the stranger or guest. Indeed, the smaller the house, the more flexible it becomes, spilling onto the street intermittently, where public and private intersect, merge, blur and often become undifferentiated. When walking in the street past the threshold of the house, one becomes engaged in a form of interior-exteriority, which necessarily complicates and enriches the conversation around public and private space. The social space of rooftops in many cities of the Global South is another example of complex layered spaces that are neither purely public nor private.

Acknowledging the influence of western education on the way we speak about space (even in Karachi), we appropriate Michel Foucault's description of 'other spaces' or heterotopias: "Simultaneously mythic and real contestations of the space in which we live... capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." They are peculiar spaces in that they are neither utopias nor dystopias: spaces like libraries and museums; landfills and ships; thick lines on maps; refugee camps; the blurry intersection of house and street; a collage; a *jugaaru* washing machine used to make lassi milkshakes; and, the 36 hour Factory of Thought itself.

Using this definition, the city in crisis is a heterotopia too; in crisis it reveals itself as a site of intense contestation, incompatibility and juxtaposition. Reading such space closely resembles reading fiction. While the existence of such spaces pre-dates the Foucauldian terminology, Karachi is bursting at the seams with 'heterotopias'.

In two of our previous projects *Mera Karachi Mobile Cinema* and *Projections* we learned from such spaces and moments in the city and developed a *jugaar* aesthetic in response, as well as a guerilla performance strategy. Being tentative was a way of allowing our structure itself to be precarious in response to those 'other' moments that we found so compelling in the city.

In another more recent project, *The Gandhi Engine Commission*, we used the device of storytelling to collage juxtapositions of time and place – from imperial histories to a neocolonial present; from

a global space of consumption to a waste treatment site in Lahore.

We drew from the river Ravi, its memories and silted archives of development and destruction, sewage, waste and toxicity. We linked disparate actors and places, such as the recycled metal parts from the toxic Gaddani ship-breaking yards in Karachi that are brought to the Ravi in Lahore to build dreamy waterfront housing developments for the now global Pakistani consumer.

Working with the river influenced our practice tremendously. We paused to resonate with its sentient ecology and, as urban dwellers, examined our relationship to its decay. We thought about the river as a transforming body with agency, with stories of its own to tell; a place that was at once a source of energy for various industries and agriculture, a site of garbage disposal, a repository of information, and a backdrop to dreams of future development. A site of promise and exclusion.

An image burns itself into our peripheral vision:

*A landslide of construction debris submerging apartments in Shenzhen.*

*A sea of cranes dig through a dystopic landfill of modernity.*

*Special economic zones appear as the murky subconscious of our consumption.*

During the 36-hour Factory of Thought we shared a new project called *Waste Agency*. Once again, the devices of storytelling and fiction are used to excavate and burrow below ground to reach the subsoil of development, also an 'other space', another heterotopia. *Waste Agency* explores the parallel universe of the underground as an example of 'other space', as a counter-site to hegemonic notions of public space. It is a response to the idea shared by Zygmunt Bauman, that "waste and wasted lives are the inevitable debris of modernity," an examination of this waste, the residue of our refinement, for traces of a longer, slower, deeper history.

In order to be able to talk about the urban, we want to go beyond it in scale to include narratives of ecology, and the agency of inorganic and non human matter, that are entangled in our conversations about cities and space.

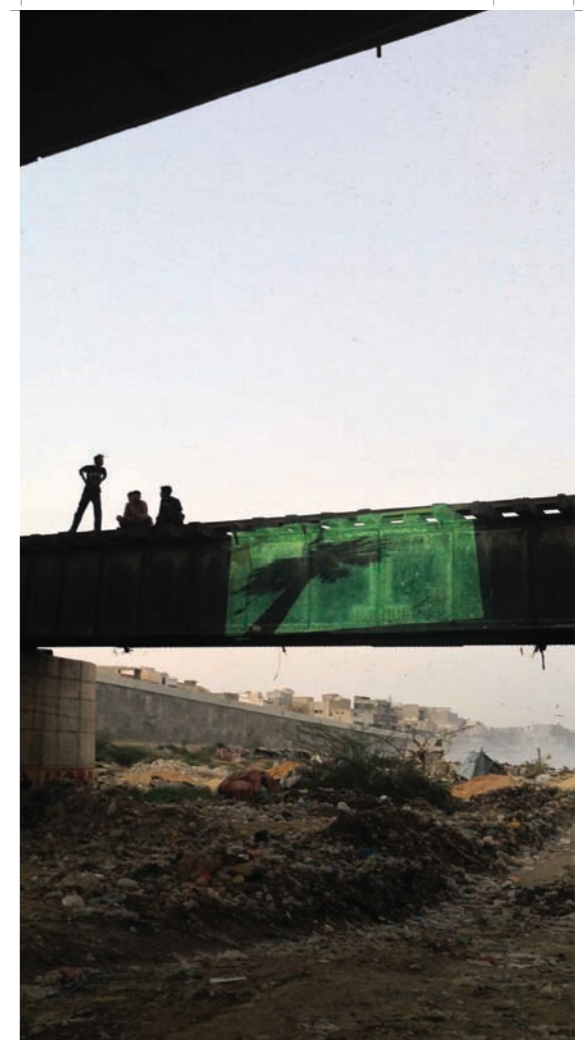
In doing so, we point towards the shallowing of the ground and the thickening of the air. While there are discussions about reclaiming territories of public space, we would like to draw attention to the 'de-territorialization' of the ground and the persistent exhaustion of its fragments that enable our modern lifestyles. To quote Jussi Parikka and Benjamin Bratton: "We [all] carry little pieces of Africa in our pockets."

Today, we reflect on the invisible spaces beneath our feet: the underbellies and the undergrounds, the regions that sustain us; spaces synonymous with globally distributed cheap labour, undergirding the visible spaces of our consumption.

We need to reassess our needs and desires, our performances of publicness and urgently point to the invisible spaces of production that enable them.

The undergrounds symbolise spaces of excessive production, as well as wastelands of our castaways. They are witness to our accumulation; sites where public and private collapse. Spaces of rest and spaces of sedimentation, spaces of invisibility. They are counter spaces with counter publics. Other spaces. Heterotopias. Haunting, parallel universes.

How do we zoom out of ourselves to think in new time-frames? Perhaps the undergrounds offer alternative sensibilities. What kinds of solidarities and empathies do we develop in the face of a disappearing ground, disappearing sea, disappearing breath? How can we think like dust? What kinds of agency do waste and wasted lives exert back on the commons? How can we slow down, stop, and disappear as an act of resistance?



**A HIGHWAY IS A PARK: PARQUE MINHOCÃO  
RENATO CYMBALISTA (SÃO PAULO)**



(1-6) At the weekend the Minhocão highway becomes the Minhocão park in São Paulo, leaving room for all sorts of activities. / All photographs by Athos Comolatti, presented by Renato Cymbalista during his contribution to the Denkraum 'Public Space as Contested Space.'

# THE 'NEXT "INVASIVE" IS "NATIVE"'

## CONVERSATION WITH COOKING SECTIONS (LONDON)

**Cooking Sections** are a duo of spatial practitioners, Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe, based in London. They explore the systems that organize the world through food. Using installation, performance, mapping and video, their research-based practice explores the overlapping boundaries between visual arts, architecture and geopolitics. Here, in conversation with Meriem Chabani and John Edom of New South, Daniel and Alon discuss the role of fact and fiction in their work, arguing for an expanded lexicon to replace the redundant dichotomy of public/private in relation to shared spaces, and for greater recognition of the role of non-human actors in our urban environments.

**Meriem Chabani:** Yesterday you kicked off this event with the performance *The 'Next "Invasive" Is "Native"'* and it struck us as a powerful use of narration to illustrate the creation of otherness and the alien. I wonder: at what moment did the format of narration, of fiction *per se*, appear as the most relevant and efficient vessel for the transmission of your message?

**Daniel Fernández Pascual:** Well, thanks for inviting us. What you were saying is quite an important aspect of the whole project. We've been doing it for a longer time and this is an iteration. We've been approaching it from different angles, but the component of science fiction in a way plays a very important role for us in terms of how it determines the way space is constructed. Because all of the fabrications or narratives about that precise image of a plant are eventually what determine many aspects of how landscape is built, or how property is valued.

**Alon Schwabe:** I think also a big component of the work here is fiction – we're talking about it as

fiction, as a narrative, that is something invented – but all the examples we showed today are one hundred percent real and key features in the way that we are dealing with 'alien' species: various examples of how these narratives have been constructed. So I think it is more that the fiction is all around us and it is a matter of framing or putting it together in some or way or another.

**DFP:** And in that sense it is also interesting for us to put together different headlines from the media, which could be considered as real because they represent 'real' journalism, with these science fiction movies that have been invented to do exactly the same thing: promote certain agendas while situating themselves within a fictional realm.

**MC:** In a way your work appears as a form of counter-propaganda, shining a light on media headlines to make the thread of fear-mongering obvious, as is apparent in the case of the Japanese Knotweed that you showed us in your performance. You base a lot of your work on reality and the various ways it can be distorted. One could also argue that the set-up for your performance created a form of public space: is spatial distribution taken into account in your thinking process?

**AS:** In a way yes. I think that since the project and the research investigate how space is being constructed, of course the output or the way it manifests also has to do with the way that space takes shape. I think it works in both ways. For instance, this project started when we were invited to do a research project on the history of ice cream in Glasgow, which sounds a bit arbitrary but there is a very strong history there of Italian migration that brought ice cream to the city: there is a whole narrative of otherness, and of these 'outsiders'



*The 'Next "Invasive" Is "Native"'* is an installation/lecture/performance by Cooking Sections performed by Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe during the 36-hour Factory of Thought / Photographs by Ivar Veermäe.

that are coming in and by bringing this tradition of ice cream making are 'destroying the city'. You had these articles in the newspapers saying that ice cream cafés are sites of promiscuity, where women can stay out late and meet men and so on. For us it was a very interesting space to discuss this 'alien' species and to see how something that was completely outside and not culturally accepted became completely embedded and celebrated in the urban fabric. But today you have another component that is being rejected. So we used these ice cream cafés to make ice cream out of 'invasive' species and to stage that discussion in those ice cream parlours.

**DFP:** There is certainly a public component: here, in our contribution yesterday and today, but it is also about the public at large. What is interesting for us is to raise awareness of these issues that go beyond what happens here. Because it is something that really affects people in their everyday lives, especially in the UK in terms of property and real estate value. For us it is about public space at a much wider level, the public sphere.

**John Edom:** Relating back to that: the idea of ownership. As you've said, during this 36 hour Factory of Thought, we're addressing the question of public interest, but mostly through the question of public space. That perhaps has a recognisable form when we think about it: it's in the city, it's where people meet. But a lot of your work investigates spatially other aspects of public interest, in terms of ownership, privatisation, political and media manipulations, and the effect of singular or connected historical events on the public and how they react to – and interact with – those. Do you see a direct connection between the way you approach these subjects, these historical narratives, and the ways that we can begin to address these popular configurations of what public space is in the city?

**DFP:** It is a topic that we discuss a lot because it's very hard to define what is 'public'. It's the eternal question: whether it is public space or not, if it is public, how public; if private, how private. But I really believe that the challenge is to come up with new terms to approach a space that is negotiated by different people. Coming from the context of London, where space itself is becoming more and more part of a neo-liberal economy, I don't think we can separate that easily between

private and public any more. There are many other in-betweens and many other taxonomies of space. We need to think for the future, how do we define those? For instance, streets, universities, museums or libraries. Are they public if privately funded? All of those traditional public spaces are less and less public just because there is little or no public funding behind their construction. When money comes from philanthropy or private donations, I don't think we can keep calling it public. We need new terms.

**AS:** I think we always see these narratives in a very spatial way, even if we don't deal with something that is clearly space. For us, all of these forces construct space. There are various examples in the performance we are doing here, but also in our other work. These are various phenomena that were not necessarily pre-determined or pre-configured for spatial issues, but of course they completely shaped the space we live in. In that sense, this is the key question that underlines all of the research and the narratives that we work on and construct.

**JE:** In, for example, your project *Boundary Gazpacho*, you describe ownership of particular strains of plant or vegetable, which is a relatively new phenomenon: in the past we might not have considered that a tomato could be copyrighted and that we would have to get permission to grow it. Do we need to start to think about these kinds of things – that maybe we weren't even conscious of before – as being something to be claimed by the public?

**AS:** Of course, but I think this is the whole question that we try to follow in our work, because it is about space, and public space is constructed from many things. It is not only the square that we occupy during our afternoons, it's not where we sit on Friday night, or have a break during our work day. I think what Daniel was alluding to before was that, precisely, there is a problem when we continue to address these questions in these very clear dichotomies and typologies. I think that to a certain extent they don't exist any more.

**DFP:** Not only for the built environment but for many other disciplines, all these issues become very relevant. The moment you need to dig a hole to build a building you are entering the public space of certain plants, of certain insects, of many forces and ecologies, and they all have an

important agenda. It's not that they are all completely separated from the built environment *per se*. So I think all of these forces and stakeholders are part of that understanding of space at large.

**AS:** In the case of the *Boundary Gazpacho*, if you start thinking there, for instance, about the salt, and the threshold of salinity and how that determines where the sea begins and where the land for building ends, you can start determining: here is the beach and over there real estate speculation starts. And then you have a very small particle that in a way you can start engaging with and constructing something completely different with, rather than just thinking about pure built form.

**MC:** What about food habits against social constructions? For quite a long time, France had this big public debate about national identity, beginning under the Nicolas Sarkozy presidency. There was this obsession with the definition of a national identity, with discourses circulating towards the chimera of an unadulterated Frenchness. However, the most popular meal in France at the moment is couscous. The popularity of this meal, a direct result of the French colonial empire, in no way reflects the French perception of the population that brought it about. So I'm wondering if, throughout your work, you are seeing correlations or dissonance between consumption of food and the origin of the food itself?

**AS:** What I think predetermines the topics that we deal with is the built environment – the natural or the man-made environment. We're not necessarily dealing with the cultural and sociological aspects of that. Of course there's a lot of hybridisation and of course there's a lot of interaction between things that are developing, but then you are getting into pop culture: what is popular today versus what was popular back then. Sometimes we might use it as an instigator, but I think so far it has never been the core of the work because then I think it's very hard for us to use that to make an argument for a space and for how space is being made and constructed. It's a different argument. It has to do with history, with personal histories, with desires, which are all very important discussions to have, but I think they are very different. They are secondary for us.

**DFP:** In a way this sociological aspect is embedded in our work but we usually try to start from somewhere else. I was just thinking about the

case of sugar in Britain, for instance, where Tate & Lyle have started a new campaign about how healthy brown sugar and sugar cane are, and that we shouldn't be eating nasty white sugar etc, etc. Of course there is a whole agenda about European subsidies, about who is or is not funding or subsidising what, and again there's this kind of friction. I don't know if it's a matter of nationalism or non-nationalism, but the core of the problem is the market and whose interests are being threatened at what time by which policies. So then in a way, yes, we could read couscous, as you were saying, at a wider level of how and why that is happening at that point in time, which unveils what the approaches to migration law are at a certain time.

**JE:** It is a Factory of Thought, so I'm just going to ask you to speculate a little! You mentioned that there might be new terms that would need to be utilised to think about these ambiguities between public and private and maybe third spaces, which have also been mentioned. Could you imagine how we might begin to configure those terms, if you have any ideas?

**AS:** I would hope to see a bit more discussion about particles, about threads, about leaves, and how through tiny objects or very big objects, we can start reconfiguring space, rather than being put in a moment where what defines space is the traditional built environment as this very complicated apparatus. Through small agents we can begin to understand space, as well as to intervene in and recreate it.

**DFP:** I was thinking of another project – it's not the solution at all, but it's something we already tried to address: how do you come up with new words or concepts? How do you... try something. *Climavore*, for instance, is a project that tries to think about ways of building landscape through an approach based on new climatic seasons. Once we don't have spring, summer, autumn and winter any more – when you can get anything in the supermarket at any time – we are instead increasingly faced with different events of drought, desertification, floods, and there will probably be more and more in the future. So how do we use them as an opportunity to design landscape through our eating habits? Instead of being carnivores or vegetarians, we would become 'climavores'. It's something that we are still experimenting with, which might lead to new trains of

thought, we don't know. But again it's about how we come up with new logics. For us, I think it's all about that, how to blur boundaries between disciplines. You can't think of the built environment in an isolated way, without thinking of ecology or law or little insects. So yes, particles! But when I was at school learning planning policies, nobody taught me about insects! And they are crucial in order to either follow or circumvent the law. That is what many real estate developers are doing. All those aspects have to become part of a whole agenda and that will be a new form of lexicon that will determine factors constructing public space, or 'something' space.

**MC:** I have one last question, which relates to this one, in that it suggests looking beyond the present to future situations. You have integrated history and multiple factors as you mentioned, from the insect, to the plant, to climatic change. At the intersection of all the factors that you take into account, do you think that, beyond the analysis of a given condition, you could even start to predict dynamics and movements? You create fictions of the past – though not fictional in the sense that they are based on these real events, real objects, real things – but the way you put them together creates a narrative that people can engage with. Do you think it would be possible to do that, to create a fiction for the future?

**AS:** Well, I hope that this is what we are doing! If we talk about what we are doing here, it is presenting this issue of 'alien' 'invasive' species and then bringing them to the audience to taste them, and through that, breaking some kind of wider separation whilst also creating an understanding that could be completely embraced and become part of life. They have many uses; some we explored today, some that are 'monster-ised,' and others that could be cherished. I think this is the narrative that follows in this case. The work tries to break these conventions and of course, through that, create new ones. Again, we are constructing a sort of space where people can inhabit certain ideas, and these can become certain ways of behaving. Someone else in 20 years will hopefully come and say: "Those guys, they were completely wrong! They did a horrible thing!" But I think this is how it works. I hope.

**DFP:** I think something that is always important when you start considering these thresholds, is that the more thresholds are imposed on peo-

ple, the more opportunities exist for everyone to come up with alternatives, not to follow a rule. I was thinking of a case – I think it was in Madrid – where there was a whole group of people who wanted to trespass private property and occupy vacant space in the middle of the city. The only way they found to do it 'legally' was to call a licensed beekeeper to go in and open the door! Apparently there's a loophole in the law that says that if you're a beekeeper you have access to any property in the country and can trespass private property for safety reasons. So if I remember correctly, they actually called some beekeepers, who have a legitimate right to trespass property, to jump the fence and open the doors. And nothing happened. It's not a fiction, it's a total reality, but you play with these limit conditions and new solutions appear that are very site specific, that belong to that context, to that particular legislation or regulation. I think more and more of those approaches are happening.



Projects by Cooking Sections: (1) *Cases of Confusion*: Ryanair Wardian trolley, Easyjet Wardian trolley, British Airways Wardian trolley, banana plants, soil. (2) *Today We Are Green*: a fountain alternately gives away either rum or ethanol according to the daily oil price on NASDAQ stock market. (3) *Climavore* Performative Dinner at the Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam.

# THE MECHANICS OF CLAIMING

ELPIDA KARABA (ATHENS)

**Elpida Karaba is an art theorist and independent curator based in Athens. She teaches art theory and art history, and works with research-based curatorial practices focusing on collaborative working methods. In 2014, the first performance of her in-process curatorial educational program PAT (Temporary Academy of Arts) took place in Peristeri, Athens. Her research interests and publications are specifically related to art theory and criticism, political theory and discourse analysis in documentary, activist and performative art practices. Elpida's essay, which discusses the potentials of archives and other performative practices as alternative and powerfully political forms of public space, is an edited version of the text that formed the core of her presentation during the Denkraum 'Public Space as Contested Space' at the 36 hour Factory of Thought.**

From the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, public space is increasingly reclaimed as condensed space. The issue of public space as antagonistic space has been the focus of art practice and theory for several decades, and the democratisation of public space is particularly high on the agenda of cultural institutions and events, as is the case for the Fights and Fictions event.

My interest in the issue of public space extends beyond the physical space of the city to include archives and speech acts as forms of public space and sites for public claim. Understanding these forms as a public space of contestation is not as evident as a demonstration in a public square, the claim of a park, the reaction to privatisation of a public space, the intervention in a specific building, road or squat. However, if we can understand 'public' as something that ought

to concern us all, and 'public space' as a place where such public concerns can be expressed, made known and communicated to a broader audience, archives and speech acts can perform this role and have the potential to act as public domains where one might claim her history, her identity and redesign institutions.

The constitution of an archive, the delivery of a lecture, or a public speech act, aims primarily at producing a conceptual space that enables identities, concepts and groups to detach themselves from specific, naturalised ideological images, and allows crucial categories for subjects and society to emerge and be revised, emptied and reformulated. These acts create a space where claims connected to symbolic struggles and new interpretative frameworks are supported in a public realm. 'Matters of fact' can become 'matters of concern', setting up the hegemony of a new paradigm.

I come from Greece, a place where archive systems are limited or to a great extent dysfunctional due to a lack of funding or relevant institutions. There is also a degree of resistance towards efforts to archive recent history, in recollection of the 1970s military junta and its archived files on suspect individuals: people were safer when unarchived, leading to a heightened consciousness of – and a culture of suspicion toward – recording, filing and visibility.

For some researchers, the idea of not having archives and traces is liberating, allowing them to construct from fragments and imagination. Nevertheless, in many cases the side effect is an individualistic, particularistic approach to handling and disseminating phenomena that permits certain ideological conceptions and preconceptions to persist. The constitution of archives and the



(1) The Soft Power Lectures, 2016, Kostis Velonis, *Design of a State of Emergency Sculpture*. (2) The Soft Power Lectures, 2016, Constantinos Hadjinikolaou, *From Sunset to Sunrise*. (3) The Soft Power Lectures, 2016, PAT, Athens-Oberhausen, *The Energy of Two Cities* / All photographs by Elpida Karaba

performance of history using methods that provide both the freedom offered by deconstructed archives, and the possibility of targeting systemic archives, could generate interesting spaces of juncture and disjuncture between the institutional and the instituent. The archive or the speech act assumes the role of a vector that articulates a discourse in the name of a group or around which a group identity may be articulated. The production of an archive or a speech act can therefore function as an act of emancipation, rather than as an act of repression, because it places anew this power at the disposal of agents, producing a 'political relationship'.

For example, *RadioStation\_A*, by artist Yiota Ioannidou was an archival re-enactment dedicated to the radio station 'Solidarity', set up by laid-off workers in the occupied factory of Peraiki Patraiki in Patras in 1990. Ioannidou gathered material from the radio station's programs, based on the narratives and personal archives of people who took part, and then produced a re-enactment of a program, incorporating the voices of former workers, joined by the struggling voices of current precarious subjects. In this case, the construction of the archive and its re-enactment permitted reinvestment in the struggle, whose significance is closely related to present conditions of austerity and unemployment in Greece, the nodal point of incomplete demands and an impetus for people to get politically involved.

#### **Public Claim**

A public claim must have a public character, to have occurred in public or at least have been directed towards a public effect, or a person or institution of public interest. As part of the Goethe Institut's *Actopolis* Project, the Temporary Academy of Arts (PAT), orchestrated *The Soft Power Lectures*, a curated series of events designed to advance public claims in both existing and temporarily performed public spaces through the format of performative lecture co-curated by Elpida Karaba and Glykeria Stathopoulou, organised and performed by Despina Zefkili, Panos Sklavenitis, Constantinos Hadjinikolaou, Sofia Dona and invited artists. Taking the form of collective public action, a call to arms or a discursive positioning, within the institutional and outer-institutional spaces of their performance, the Lectures set the scene for the construction and public performance of the discourse on 'exotic' Southern subjects. As such, they were designed

to bring forth disputes, and suggest alternative readings to specific essentialised issues such as 'the South' and its 'precarious', 'creative' and 'sustainable' subjects, particularly those of an Athens in crisis. The material produced around this discourse was made visible through exhibitions and other performative structures, enabling *The Soft Power Lectures* to begin to appropriate the mechanics of a public claim.

The Lectures were able to advance public claims by means of the following mechanics, which are examined by Nikos Stasinopoulos in *The Subject and the Object of the Claim: Towards a Lacanian Discourse Theoretic Approach* (Papazisis Publishing, forthcoming).

#### **Discursive Claims**

A discursive claim consists in the public articulation of a collective position, using physical or speech act mechanisms. These 'discursive opportunities' should have visibility, resonance and legitimacy.

To provide an example, during a series of performative interviews, participants were addressed with direct questions regarding their professional situation. When questioned as to whether art can be considered a profession, most gave a negative response, instead placing art in a sphere somewhere between vocation and some indefinable other. Equally, when questioned as to whether Southern women, trans gender people or other marginalised subjects are paid differently, a largely negative response was received. It is easy to forget that the South is already paid less for the same services, or that people working in the former Eastern bloc tend to be paid a fraction of those working in central or northern Europe, or that at large international cultural events you will rarely find subjects from 'exotic' Athens in influential positions. In such responses it is possible to conclude that cultural professionals in our field have internalised the fallacy of unpaid work, illustrating how difficult it is to eradicate precarity and claim decent labour conditions.

#### **Gesture**

Gestures accompanying speech acts influence how content is received, capturing and orienting the reactions of the audience. A gesture is the suspension of a conclusion and the initiation of a process of making a means visible as such. Equally, it can target latent societal preconcep-

tions and reactionary attitudes in a provocative way.

During one event, the artist Panos Sklavenitis narrated a provocative discourse on the South, developing ideas around a European geography of top and bottom, challenged constructions of national pride and complexes of inferiority and superiority or, as in the video lecture *The Champions of Pleasure*, proposed a Queer reading of Greek ancient to modern history. Other contributions examined our recent history and cultural traditions as a means to understand our past but also our current condition and interpretations of our identity, as women, cultural workers or subjects of a certain time and locality. These gestures offer framing combined with political subjectivity. They comment on the framing of collective action processes, which performs a transformative function through an alteration of the meaning of the object or in the reconfiguration of aspects of one's biography.

#### **Rupture**

Speech acts introduce a rupture in a given socio-political constellation by being creative, unauthorised and unconventional, and against routine social actions that are already instituted. That rupture is the force of the performative. *The Soft Power Lectures* aimed to produce a rupture in a certain hegemonic discourse around the South and its subjects. As opposed to a narration that emphasises the energy of the South and particularly Athens, we challenge the exotic idea of the Greek capital as the alternative exotic tourism destination of catastrophe, survival and smart AirBnB investment opportunities. As always in places caught in the eye of the storm, this gaze, as well as the development of a certain discourse and economy around it, is to be expected. We are currently part of a South experiment, a paradigm of 'creative sustainability'. However, this is a South based on repetitive power relations and stereotypes that re-localise and re-regionalise the world and its subjects in order to maintain the status quo. Athens is pending on its bipolar identity between economic catastrophe, refugee asphyxiation and exemplary creative energy. The Temporary Academy of Arts and *The Soft Power Lectures* initiated a rupture in this discourse by participating in the construction of an extra-hegemonic discourse for Athens and the South, empowering its subjects by defining them as potential agents of their own history.

The organisation of archives of the crisis and its subjects raises questions surrounding power and identity, as well as provoking the creation of new structures. The very act of instituting an archive aims to shatter naturalised categories, raise new meanings of public space and provoke new public claims, by deliberately or inadvertently producing stories. It produces outer/physical and inner/psychic space in the same manner as construction is understood to produce tangible objects. The articulation of different militant or precarious and subaltern subjects should not be viewed as an unconditional positive in itself, but the decisive role of their public appearance through an archive or a speech act, through a discursive, condensed public space where the publishing, alignment and dispersion of their demands and their conditions of existence is taking place, is indeed a positive development.

Speeches and archives are the apparatus of bio-political regulation. Archival and speech art projects aim precisely at the dismantlement and rearrangement of these very methods of regulation and at the construction of a new model. *The Soft Power Lectures* began to institute a set of processes through which speech acts and archiving are involved in the processes of creating new models of public space for condensation and claim. Through discursive opportunities, gestures, transformations and reconfigurations of one's own biography and history, through ruptures, these formations perform an affirmative dislocation from the discourse and practices that constitute and reproduce the current hegemony. Participating in the construction of this form of public space is an act of reinforcing condensed public space; a crucial act of resistance that goes beyond perpetual speculation to actively redesign democratic public spaces. The making of an archive and the development of a positional – or oppositional – discourse takes a proactive empowered stance rather than accepting withdrawal to a moralising marginal role.

# PRODUCING PUBLIC SPACE

## CONVERSATION WITH OMAR NAGATI (CAIRO)

**An experienced architect and urban planner based in Cairo, Omar Nagati has been the recipient of a number of honours and awards, including representing Egypt in the 6th Architectural Design Exhibition, Venice Biennale. He has taught at the University of British Columbia and University of California, Berkeley, with a specific focus on informal urbanism. In 2011 he co-founded CLUSTER, a platform for urban research, architecture, art, and design initiatives in downtown Cairo. Omar adopts an interdisciplinary approach to questions of urban history and design, and engages in a comparative analysis of urbanisation processes in developing countries. Here, in conversation with Meriem Chabani and John Edom of New South, Omar reflects on the first 24 hours of the Factory of Thought, in order to provide a critical commentary on the format, identifying emerging points of agreement and disjuncture, and speculating on how the thoughts produced might feed into a set of tools for approaching the politics of public space in different contexts.**

**Meriem Chabani:** It's been... 25, 26 hours since this Factory of Thought began. On the first day, you raised some points that you thought might be productive to address or consider during the event. I'm curious to hear if you have received any satisfactory response or any further enquiry regarding those points, which were: the hijack of the notion of the public, the specificity of time and space, and specific tools and methods that could generate new ideas.

**Omar Nagati:** Well, I'm glad somebody was paying attention! To be fair, I don't think that at this conference – or any other conference – we're supposed to find answers. It's more about raising questions and debating what we think of as

our convictions and contesting what is taken for granted, particularly if we come from different disciplines and different geographical, political and cultural contexts. I think that the richness comes from the encounter and opening up to new ideas, as opposed to coming with a manifesto, a resolution: "This is the definition of public space." In that sense I think it was – and still is – a process of opening up. The question is: at what time do you stop? Because I think there is also the question of coherence as much as a question of depth and investigation. At some point you really have to be able to step back and get a grasp of the larger questions. I think in that sense the program is very successful, I've met wonderful people, and many of the presentations are very inspiring. The format itself is also very new to me. I've been to events where there were artists and academics and other practitioners, but the fact that there is a very carefully curated structure of the event, in addition to the intensity of the program, the collapse of activities into a very small time, and the fact that there are discursive and non-discursive elements, including artistic performances and food and dance, have all contributed to a very active exchange and fermentation of ideas. I was a bit apprehensive of the late night session, I must say, and yesterday I think everybody knew that I was a little bit tired and not very coherent. But this also gave an opportunity, particularly the night event, the dancing and the public bar, for other participants – who were not necessarily invited guests, or people who were not necessarily interested in the discussions, but are a different kind of audience – to engage in this public forum.

We were talking earlier about the limitation of having a conference in a place, no matter how wonderful it is. The Akademie der Künste is a really incredible space, but still very secluded from the city and I have some reservations about this



(1) Omar Nagati acting as one of the critical observers during the 36-hour Factory of Thought / Photograph by Ivar Veermäe. (2) Street Vendors Initiative research project by CLUSTER / Photograph by CLUSTER (August 2015). (3) Kodak Passage in downtown Cairo re-designed by CLUSTER, The Green Oasis / Photograph by CLUSTER (January 2015).



kind of internal debate where you sit in a place while 'the city' is just around the corner. All of these questions surrounding public space, immigration, gender division, and spatial practices and tactics, could actually be experienced first-hand a few blocks away. Instead of looking at the presentation screen, we could have just had a little walk, just a couple of hours, and then come back to revisit these issues. It's more a question of grounding and testing. Berlin is a great city, as every city is unique in that sense of its specificity on the ground. But in a sense this format opened up, and the events, particularly the evening ones, managed to make up for this gap. I don't want to call it a gap, nothing is perfect. The younger generation who came last night – and I'm not judging, but I haven't seen many of them in the discussions! – they were enjoying it, they were engaging, and so the city came. A different kind of audience came and participated. In that sense the city came and took over. I felt a bit overwhelmed, it wasn't really my place, but I was playing the role of critical observer and drinker! So these are all positive things. And then we can talk about specific themes and topics. But to go back to your question, I think what I was trying to suggest earlier on was that, amongst this influx of ideas and thoughts and case studies, we need to have a little bit of structure. So I suggested during the prologue that we have three main categories: firstly, what are the conditions that we are trying to address, whether it's a capitalist or neo-liberal condition, or state militarisation, what is the general condition? I think that has more or less been addressed in different shapes and forms. The second question is the manifestation, the specificity in space and time, and we have seen examples from all over the world. The third one is about tactics, tools and methods, which can also inform the kind of practice we employ and how we move forward.

For example, in one of the earlier Denkraum round table discussions, there was a very interesting parallel. I don't think it was intentional, and it's also a kind of oxymoron, but the French group ArchiDebout were offering a tool-kit of design elements that could be assembled, almost like Lego, enabling activists and citizens to quickly build and demolish and reassemble. This is a very interesting tool-kit. Earlier Marvi Mazhar was talking about other tool-kits but which are deployed by the state, in the form of barricades and barriers. I was thinking that both of these

examples represent a new kind of urbanism, a new paradigm for shaping the city through very small implements, small-scale, replicable, more fluid and shifting. They define the urban warfare that everybody is talking about. I call it – kind of tongue-in-cheek – 'fourth generation urbanism', similar to fourth generation warfare, which is about terror. It's not State versus State, it's group versus group, it's a guerrilla-style urbanism. And I think that calls for redefining and questioning our own practice and our own pedagogy. It might open up new theorisation. I don't know. This is one of the sparks I had this morning. That's the short answer!

**John Edom:** I wanted to ask you something, which relates both to your work in Cairo and what you have just said about the idea of reaching a saturation point where you need to take a step back. I wonder if that point has been reached because we are trying to avoid discussing public space as a space of conflict, one that is not necessarily a space of 'being together' or an entirely positive environment. Sometimes it can be a negative environment that requires specific forms of negotiation, but ultimately the acceptance that we're not always going to agree. Here we are in a situation where people have their own views about public space, what it is, the relationship with private space, the informal, etc, etc. And we're in this kind of 'Club Med', disconnected from the city, almost as though we came here to stage our friendly fights, to safely test a version of public space that allows for disagreement. Can you reflect on the way that these kinds of conflicts play out in Cairo – the ways that space there is ambivalent, in terms of how the public is created, which publics are present or absent – and the way that we're discussing the public in this conference?

**ON:** It's a fascinating entry point. I hadn't thought of the format as being an experimentation or as public as such. If that was one of the intentions I think it's very intriguing. I'm going to talk about Cairo but just let me continue that thought because I think it's very interesting. I think any debate, any discursive format with a seminar, a discussion, a meeting, is a form of public. This is the essential Habermasian public: the coffee shop, journalism and so on. So in that sense we're really practising that in a very traditional way, in a civilised debate. I don't think there's anything original in that. What I was suggesting earlier is

that maybe the intensity, and the number of interventions and the duration, this might limit – not prohibit – tolerance, not because I disagree with some of the ideas – I think it's great to disagree, otherwise why are we here: if everyone agrees we can just go home – but it's about creating a tolerant and comfortable space. So for example, last night, for me, was an example of what I thought was unfortunate. The last presenter in yesterday evening's discussion, Elpida Karaba, had an incredibly complex, sophisticated, but also very carefully curated presentation. Every word was written, but she's an artist and it was very abstract. She presented at the very end when everyone was tired. For that kind of presentation, we owe her more attentiveness and alertness. That's what was missing and that's because of the format. I'm not blaming anybody, but sometimes the format prohibits.

In the same way if you look at public space, I don't believe necessarily that the design determines, allows, enables or limits. You cannot really say: "This design will lead to this practice." That's already something that has been debunked. I believe in the city as a diverse set of competing interests and narratives, one of multiplicity and heterogeneity. But what we learned in Cairo in the last few years is that after the revolution the State was relatively weak, and security was absent. In absence of this, let's say, meta or universal norm, law, or formal order – we can call it the law, we can call it the State – in the absence of that, then a vacuum is created, and in this vacuum, different rules emerge. Let's say in a street you have six, seven or eight different competing groups, and everybody is claiming the area. In absence of a meta-order, the conflict is not necessarily resolved in a nice way. You can look at extreme cases, in places like Syria where the State completely collapses, and you can see the violence that it can lead to. That's why people sometimes say it's better to have a dictatorship. I don't agree with that, but I'm just giving an extreme example.

You can look at public space at a smaller scale in the street, and one of the things I didn't say when I was showing those images, and I regret not saying it because it was very important, was that it wasn't really pretty. Yes, you can romanticise street vendors, and people taking the initiative, and in so doing, taking the law in their own hands, including building the highway exit for example. These are all great manifestations of the

resourcefulness and capacities of the people. There's no argument about that. We have to learn from that. But there's a big distinction between acknowledging these capacities and these resources and saying: "This is the way to go, let the people do what they want, let's just do away with the State." I think this is a very dangerous and slippery slope. Because the streets were in many ways aggressive: women were excluded, foreigners were excluded, older people, and so on. It was really an example of what goes wrong in absence of a meta-public. Within this meta-public you need to have multiple publics, I'm all for that. But again, this is not new, because we all have multiple identities. I could project myself as male, or middle class, or as an architect or as whatever ethnic or religious category. None of us has only one category, and in each category we have our own public. It could be a club or a group. I don't see any contradiction in having this kind of multiplicity as long as we democratically agree on a rule system under which we operate. That's why I responded to the intervention by Peter Cachola Schmal. He spoke about the bazaar, invoking the market place. I told him: "The marketplace is great, but let's not forget that it isn't a place of cultural encounter because 'marketplace' necessitates and presumes a certain order." You go to a market and of course you compete in terms of price and so on, but there are rules. You play by the rules. You don't cheat, you don't steal, you don't harass. There is a normative order that everyone agrees on. This could be agreed on democratically, or collectively, or in some other way, but there is a big difference between that and saying: "When immigration comes to a city, it's a marketplace." Also there are certain power relations, different frames of reference that are invoked, religious references, and so on.

I think reading the city as a set of multiple orders, and narratives and claims, is much healthier than reading it as 'the people' versus 'the State'. Because within communities, and within the State – as we have seen examples of – there are factions, and fractures and fissures. And within those fissures and fractures, there are different and shifting alliances: every contingent condition calls for a different alliance. So sometimes civil society aligns with the private sector against the State, for example, but sometimes it aligns itself with the State, and so on. Even within civil society you have different groups. To me, the idea of multiple publics, and multiple groups in the city

allows for a much more complex and generative reading that would allow us to position ourselves tactically to think about these issues in a healthier way.

**JE:** Wilfried Wang asked you a question after your keynote about the idea of turning these tactics, which you are using in Cairo, into a strategy. There seems to be a romantic idea of the informal, these processes that take place 'organically', and the question of how we can implement them in European cities, but Berlin seems to be an example of where this kind of thing doesn't necessarily make sense. Wilfried Wang spoke about Tempelhof and the plebiscite that was held to decide the fate of this public space in the city. Isn't that incredible, that they had a public consultation about a public space? What does it mean when we begin to romanticise these notions of the bottom-up, the grass-roots, and try to replace what are actually quite functional democratic processes with them? It seems again, and this has been brought up by other people, to be a mechanism of neo-liberalism, but how do you see that flow between what happens in Cairo and what happens in Europe? What are the lessons that we can learn from Cairo?

**ON:** I think it's a very important point. I think it came up yesterday a couple of times, where I found myself uncomfortably defending the State, which is the opposite to what my position might be usually, but again I think that every context calls for a different position. What I was trying to say is that there is a very big difference between the two strategies, between revolution and reform. In Cairo four or five years ago, and maybe during the height of the Occupy movement, we all thought we could overhaul the system and go beyond capitalism, beyond neo-liberalism and create a brave new world. This moment, to my view, is gone. I could be being pessimistic, and I probably am, but until we get the momentum and the organisational skills and the build up of another moment of radical change, I think we are confined to a reformist strategy. Reformist strategy is not necessarily all conservative; there are a range of possibilities. My interpretation of this, as we do in our own work, is to work within the cracks. That's apparent in the physical forms our work takes, but also conceptually and institutionally. If you have an authoritarian State and you can't really confront it, you could still find loopholes within the system and you subversively try

to make quick gains. And that may work. But because it works in that context, doesn't mean that it should in a democratic society. OK, none of the democracies is perfect, I mean of course, we're not idiots – but the point is, what is the alternative? You're throwing the baby out with the bath water. Yes, the State is not perfect. Yes, the State has been hijacked by capitalism. All that I agree with. But you already have democratic tools to change it. So why are you dismissing that? Because, yes, going to the streets is very romantic. But I would fight as a citizen with my right to vote and use that to change the system.

I think in many conferences I've been to there tends to be a romanticisation of the Third World, of informality, as if this is an alternative order. This to me is very dangerous, because informality is the flip side of neo-liberalism. It is really premised on absence of the State, which is exactly the agenda of the current global order. It's no accident that someone like Hernando de Soto or other people romanticise and put informality – or the 'Other Path', as he calls it – on a pedestal. Because really, it goes hand in hand with neo-liberal policy which is getting rid of the State. I think the State is the arc-symbol of public, because the State is the guardian of the public good. It's not just theoretical: if you have a fight in the street, who would you invoke? The police. You don't get your family or cousin to fight back: that's informality, and that's what we were seeing in Cairo. In the absence of police, the absence of the rule of law – assuming the law is democratically instituted, but let's say there's a law we agree on – in the absence of this law, everything is free game. If I'm stronger than I'm going to beat you up, if I'm wealthier I'm going to buy you. All things are possible. And this has to be very clear. It's very crude but it's something that Cairo taught us. So what we said was: "Yes, OK, in this temporary condition, in the short term, since the system is not really possible to change, we have to work within informality and try to find, on its own terms, possible progressive positions." But in the long term the State has an obligation towards its citizens, to provide services, such as housing, education and health. We're not giving up on that. So ideally, we're calling for citizenship and State. But in the mean time, we cannot just sit there, like radical leftists, and refuse to work within informality. There are people living in poverty. Here is the balance, here are the tactics versus strategy, and this is a different way of looking at the short term

versus long term, small scale versus large scale, idealism versus pragmatism. There are different ways to negotiate that, and I think this kind of in-betweenness is also a position of ambiguity and constant negotiation.

To give you another quick example. I said something yesterday in response to a question, that all these research topics were informed by our everyday experience. It wasn't like sitting in a Starbucks and saying: "What shall we work on next? Street vendors! Oh yes!" No. It was really our everyday struggle. A literal struggle; harassment, fights and sometimes violence. I can't tell you how many fights I went to the police station for, how many times I almost got beaten up. And of course, every time I had this kind of struggle on the ground, I couldn't help but feeling my subject position prevail: "You don't have the right to put this in front of here, there is no no-parking sign, I have the right to park here..." You know? But then when you stand back, analyse the situation and reflect, you realise that you have to step out of your subject position, and think on a larger scale. This negotiation between subjectivity and objectivity, or between the everyday and the reflective position, I think is very healthy, but also very tiring.

**MC:** I'd like to finish on a speculative question: you've gone very extensively into detail about the tactical aspects of the disposition of public space and I'm not going to go back over what we just discussed, but do you feel that you have reached a point in your professional practice as an architect where you're seeing patterns for the future that could allow you to push forward, or do you feel, and sorry if this sounds a bit bleak, that you've reached a state of stasis and that you're struggling to find new ways to move forward?

**ON:** I think it's an important question. I mean honestly, as I tried to show in my presentation, we're at a low point for sure. There's a sort of bleak political and urban condition, but also on a personal level, in terms of practice, there's a moment of disillusionment and demoralisation. So we're trying to stay positive, and the easiest way if you cannot really create or generate new ideas, is to at least continue what you're doing. I think we have enough material to extend. Let's not say replicate, but extend. We can do more passageways and extend this idea. But the other thing to do is to use this moment of withdrawal

to reflect. Because in the first two or three years after the revolution, we were hardly able to catch up with what was going on. Every day there was something happening: a protest, a fire, a demonstration, a police raid, and so on. We were spending most of our time collecting and mapping and archiving. Now this moment has gone and there's little happening. Of course there are still some things, but not as intense, not as exciting, and also it's less possible and more dangerous to go out and take photos and do interviews. So what do you do? You start to open up your old books and the material and start to analyse and reflect and hypothesise and theorise. This is what we're doing here in this conference in a way. Sometimes this moment of withdrawal is a tactical withdrawal as opposed to a defeat. I would like to think of it that way: you're still fighting the war, but having a tactical retreat. This is the way I try to put a spin on this bleak moment, to say that maybe it's temporary. Maybe if we talk again in a year I'll be in a different place: this is my solace, at least for now.

**THE MILITARISED LANDSCAPES OF KARACHI**  
**MARVI MAZHAR (KARACHI)**



(1) Security barriers outside Karachi Grammar School. (2) Police checkpoint outside a public park. (3) Security barriers outside the Saudi Arabian Consulate. / All photographs courtesy of Marvi Mazhar.



(1) Billboards advertising Airport Security Forces. (2) Earth bag barricades outside a Christian missionary school. (3) Security barriers outside Karachi Grammar School. / All photographs courtesy of Marvi Mazhar.

# STREETS AND PUBLICS IN BEIRUT

## MONA FAWAZ & AHMAD GHARBIEH (BEIRUT)

**Mona Fawaz is an associate professor of urban studies and planning in the Department of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut. Her work investigates the social production of city spaces based on an interdisciplinary empirical approach that looks at actor strategies, legal/informal regulatory frameworks, and property regimes in informal settlements as well as large-scale public and private urban developments. Ahmad Gharbieh is Associate Creative Director at the design and communication agency Mind the Gap and teaches at the Department of Architecture and Graphic Design at the American University of Beirut. His work explores mapping as a method of research, analysis, and representation of sociospatial phenomena. Mona and Ahmad were coeditors of *Beirut: Mapping Security*, a publication and project initiated for the Fourth International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam.**

Rushing pedestrians, strollers, café spill-overs, pan-handlers, peddlers, valets and security personnel. Leisurely users reading the newspaper, chatting, playing cards or soccer, in the less busy hours. Beirut's mixed-use streets are much more than 'sites of passage'; they are a ballet of ambulant and sedentary practices of what one might call multiple, cohabiting publics attempting to carve out spaces of livelihood in the city.

In fact, no space better exemplifies Beirut's multiple publics and their strategies of cohabitation than the city's streets. Streets are sites of leisure and socialisation. They are sites of appearance where individuals and groups seek self-assertion in their visibility that may mark recognition of their belonging to the polity, whether as youth, as women, or as migrants. Streets extend the ways in which we think of acceptable practices in pub-

lic, and are filled with economic transactions that enable temporary and more permanent livelihood strategies to materialise. They act as sites of 'inhabitation', claimed through regular practices that acquire their legitimacy only through repetition: after a few days or weeks, the user, whether peddler, beggar or reader, acquires a right of place in the street that he or she can enforce since it has achieved social recognition.

In this short essay and selection of maps, we seek to highlight the multiple dimensions of Beirut's public spaces, using the frame of the city's streets. We focus on three forms of practice – Inhabiting, Policing, and Marking – in order to revisit what is meant by 'public' and the functions 'public space' can have in a city such as Beirut.

In thinking about Beirut's public spaces, we deliberately choose to speak of 'street' rather than 'sidewalk' in order to highlight the porous relations that blur the boundaries between ground floor activities, pedestrian and vehicular passage, and hence buildings, sidewalks, and pavements. The slow-moving and ever more congested traffic is intersected and infiltrated by swarming pan-handlers, peddlers, and pedestrians throughout the whole day, regulated at times by sequences of street lights but most often not. Sidewalks are equally vulnerable to vehicular encroachments, as many are occupied by parked cars and motorcycles. Ground floor commercial activities tend to invade sidewalks and streets, with café seating and the extension of stores' goods displays, as well as the more ambulatory delivery motorcycles, valets parking cars, double-parked vehicles, 'drive throughs' relying on the main street arteries for passage, etc.

Our use of the terminology of 'street' rather than 'sidewalk' also enables us to distance our interest



(1) Shoeshiners on the Corniche, Beirut. (2) Parking control in Ashrafieh, Beirut. (3) Selling fruit trees on Spears, Beirut. / All photographs by Giulia Guadagnoli (March 2014).

from a wide body of – typically American – literature that has concerned itself with the regulation of so-called ‘unruly’ open-access spaces such as sidewalks, whose roles as civic spaces of encounter need to be protected from the excesses of so-called ‘undesirable’ social groups (see, for example, Robert C. Ellickson, “Controlling Chronic Misconduct in City Spaces: Of Panhandlers, Skid Rows, and Public-Space Zoning,” *Yale Law Journal*, 1996). Our interest is not in deploring the poor quality of sidewalks, though public underinvestment in these shared spaces is dramatic. Nor is it in devising regulations for ‘organising’ these spaces (as in Annette M. Kim, “The Mixed-Use Sidewalk: Vending and Property Rights in Public Space.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 78 (3), 2012). Ultimately, and against a barrage of claims about the inability of the ‘public’ to in – or co-habit the city’s designated public spaces – an all too familiar argument for the privatisation of the commons – we argue for an understanding of shared space as an operational landscape enabled by flexible, ever-changing accommodations.

#### **Inhabiting the Street**

As spaces containing a multiplicity of encounters, street transactions and practices, streets provide us with numerous insights into the nature of the ‘public’ and its organisation. We begin with the single observation that rather than an abstract ‘citizen’ public resembling the one typically posited within a framework of liberal politics, Beirut’s streets reflect a multiplicity of publics, groups of city dwellers with multiple affiliations – whether by gender, sect, kin, nation, or sexuality – but also individual, strategic calculations that constantly recompose their relationships as they attempt to carve out viable livelihoods for themselves and their families. Thus, one can read the relations that connect newspaper sellers to policemen and taxi drivers, or groups of peddlers, beggars and a multitude of others, as key institutional structures that provide the indispensable ‘infrastructure’ to secure one’s access to the sidewalk and street as the basis of livelihood. This is the ‘social infrastructure’ that AbdouMaliq Simone describes in Johannesburg (“People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg.” *Public Culture* 16 (3), 2004), the fluid structure of human relations that provides the network and support for prearrangements, understandings, protocols, alliances and deals that materialise in the patterns of spatial appropriation that are documented in

our maps. This rich infrastructure connects municipal agents – policemen, residents, peddlers, lottery ticket sellers, beggars, store owners and others – allowing them to secure small encroachments in an environment where reclaiming one’s right to the city is enacted silently, ephemerally, and in a constant negotiation of wins and losses.

It is on the basis of this infrastructure that ‘Issam’ is able to secure his coveted spot, strategically located at the intersection of two main streets where he can display his produce to both pedestrians and car drivers. It is through this infrastructure that ‘Manal’ can maintain her small carpet at the entrance of a mall, securing the base from which her three children will approach shoppers for change. It is this same infrastructure that connects policemen, valets, delivery motorcyclists, beggars, and taxi drivers on busy street corners, expanding the networks all the way from buildings to the moving traffic. The relations are flexible – and this flexibility allows them to be generally productive – but they are also rife with inequalities, reproducing at multiple levels the same forms of discrimination observed in many other corners of the city: of men towards women, of locals towards refugees, of local workers towards migrant workers, of old timers towards newcomers, of insiders towards outsiders, etc. Thus, we observe that beggars know that they should not sit on bollards reserved for taxi drivers and lottery sellers; migrant workers know they cannot respond to harassment; and Lebanese males reaffirm their authority and control of the street by commenting on any passerby. The list is long and familiar.

#### **Policing the Public**

Policing is one of the most important practices through which one can understand the functioning of the public. To speak of policing first evokes the public authority of the State. At once the image and enactors of public authority, policemen are also everyday users, negotiators, oppressors or accomplices, friends or foes in Beirut’s streets. Policemen may at times manage the street, but they also manage their position in the street through an array of alliances and bullying strategies, enabling them to reap personal profit and invest in their social capital as the ‘police force’, while nonetheless rendering a minimal function of public order or its semblance. To speak of policing in Beirut is also to recognise that it occurs in multiple other forms, and is far from monopolised

by State agents. Thus, political parties, private security companies, and other armed non-state actors police their territories in ways that may at times out-power public police forces. Moreover, numerous social agents participate in policing practices, each exerting power over one or several groups that she or he believes may be controlled. For example, men often police women’s dress codes and behaviors, while Lebanese individuals police migrant workers and refugees.

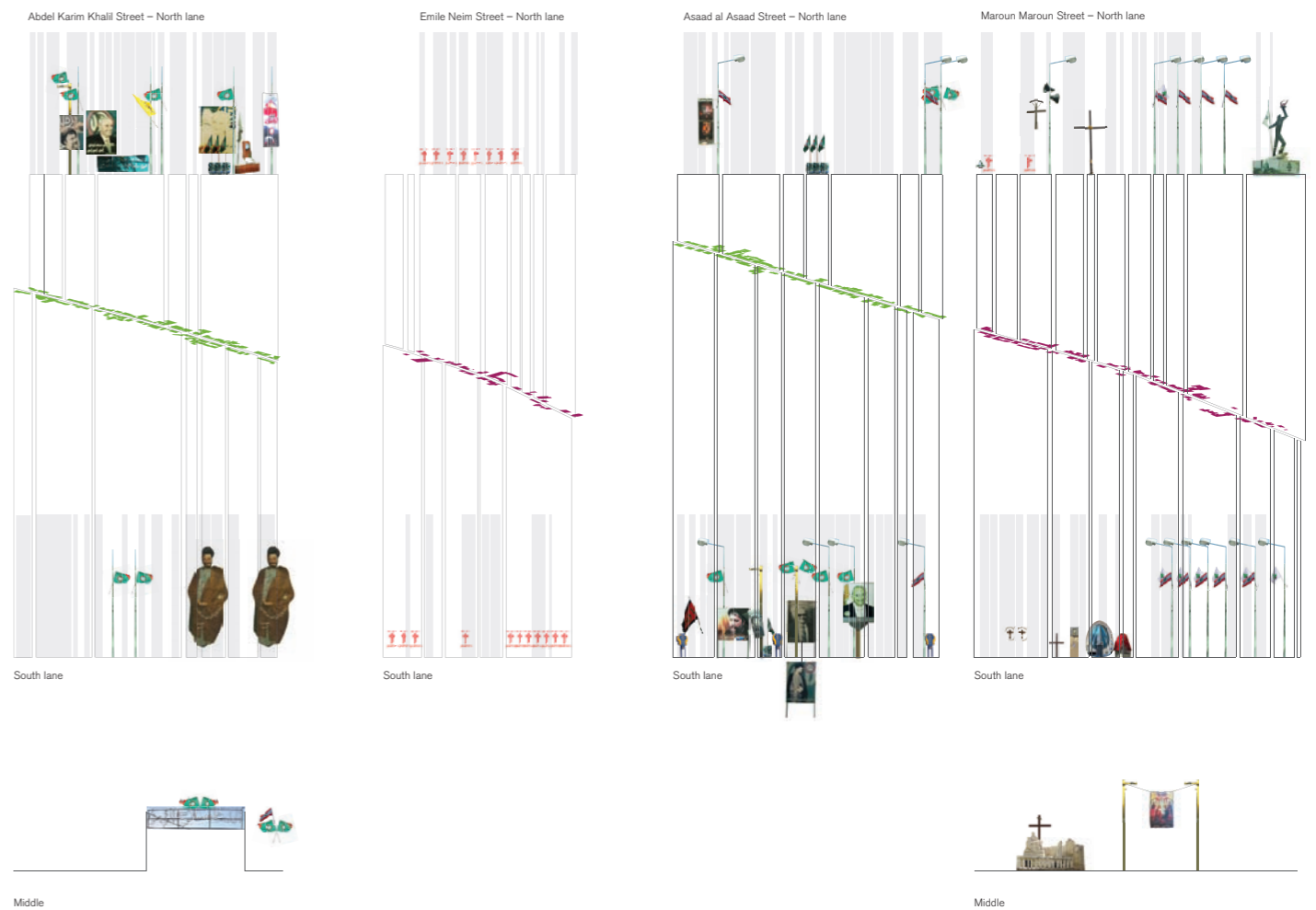
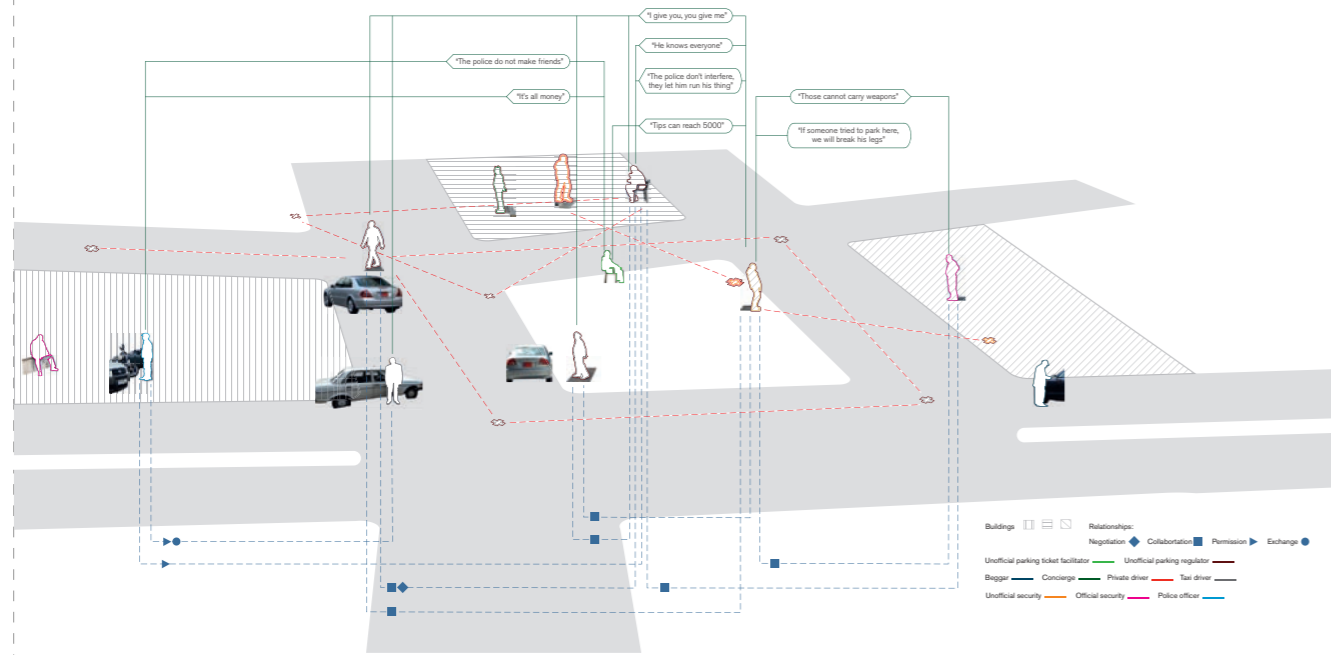
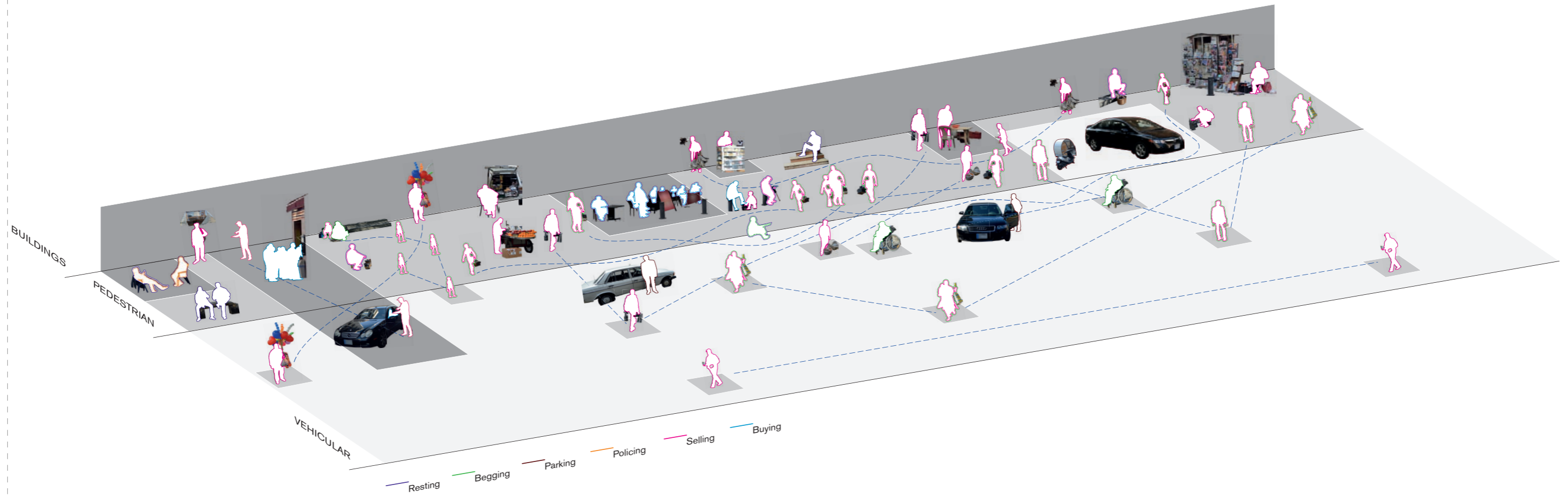
It is nonetheless with the analysis of the public police force that a nuancing of ‘public’ is most necessary: if the police truly represent a public, and indeed it may, this public is far from the all-encompassing anonymous mass of ‘city dwellers.’ Rather, the police itself appears male, ‘Lebanese’, and imbued with sectarian alliances while the ‘public’ it serves is classified according to class, sex, sect, and other xenophobic and clan-like considerations. We may remember here the common sight of young Syrian shoe-shiners running away from policemen, their heavy bags strapped on their backs, while older Lebanese men are entitled to their shoe-shining corner. We may evoke mini-vans, peddlers, and taxi drivers securing advantageous spots on the street through their ‘old-time’ relation to the police, even if the protection of these spots requires violations of traffic and parking laws. We may take note of bakeries, convenience stores, sandwich stalls, and other businesses that secure informal occupation of sidewalks and pavements and the blind eye of the police for in exchange for free meals or hot bread.

#### **Street Markers**

Despite their unequivocal label as ‘public’ spaces, Beirut’s streets are almost invariably marked by visible signs that stamp city clusters as territories, each falling under the control of particular political factions or sectarian groups without fully supplanting their national identity. Thus all streets bare the marks of municipal agencies by way of their names and building numbers, but also political groups through posters, graffiti, stencils, and other forms of marking. The latter fluctuate in intensity, peaking during election periods when larger social coalitions are needed. However, the writing on the walls rarely summarises or reflects actual street practices accurately. Thus, in Ayn el-Remaneh, a ‘frontier’ neighbourhood that acts as the intersection between two ‘hot’ zones, we found that shoppers did not account for territo-

rial street markings and boundaries for their consumption practices: they looked for ‘cheap’ and ‘nice’ things to buy. If street markings are tightly reflective of the dwelling practices of Lebanese users who only look for residences within their sectarian enclaves, foreign migrant workers and recent refugees are inclined to cross any border to secure more affordable housing. In sum, the markers are important, but do not simply mirror the practices of any particular group. More nuanced studies of ‘where people go’ are needed to explain mobility tactics in the divided city.

In closing, let us remember that it is impossible to converge on a coherent definition of what makes up Beirut’s public spaces, what qualifies as a ‘public’, or to outline characteristics of ‘public spaces’ that would hold across the city’s multiple neighbourhoods and quarters. An analysis of Beirut’s streets would be fraudulent unless it clearly recognised the multiplicity of configurations in which street practices materialise. In that sense, it is impossible to articulate a comprehensive analysis of all Beirut’s streets, just as it would be impossible to do so for Berlin, Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, London, Lagos, Rio de Janeiro, or Jakarta. This research hence documents a number of streets, intersections, and ‘hot spots’ that cover particular, replicable scenarios, but do not represent the entire range of scenarios and realities that make-up street life in Beirut. Our aim, rather, is to convey the image of a vibrant city life, rife with negotiations and accommodations, where informal norms and regulations balance seemingly disparate, frequently conflicting needs and enable a multiplicity of users with unequal power and resources to reach viable, yet flexible arrangements that organize their interactions and the operations of the street. It invites readers to pay closer attention to the everyday spaces of interaction, the less monumental in-between spaces of socialisation, as modes of being together. These modes reflect acts of solidarity, sociability, and an enormous ability to negotiate and coordinate, but also an enactment of inequalities: of mobility and speed, of alliances and arrangements and, ultimately, of possibilities and opportunities.



(Figure 1, top) Inhabiting the Street – 2015  
 Charting various activities that occur between street, sidewalk, and building entrances across a number of streets in Beirut, this study traces the daily negotiations and the various uses of street space.  
 Survey conducted between February and April 2014  
 Research assistant: Giulia Guadagnoli. Design assistant: Sara Sukhun

(Figure 2, left) Policing the Street – 2015  
 Illustrating how authority is negotiated between building caretakers, valets, beggars, peddlers, policemen and others at a busy urban intersection in Beirut  
 Survey conducted between February and April 2014  
 Research assistant: Giulia Guadagnoli. Design assistant: Sara Sukhun

(Figure 3, right) Territorialising the Street – 2015  
 Mapping political and religious markers of territory on the streets of the greater Chiyah area.  
 Survey conducted between February and May 2014  
 Research assistants: Yara Hamade, Nadine Khayat and Jeffrey Rosenthal. Design assistant: Lynn el Hout

# GROUNDS FOR NEGOTIATION

## CONVERSATION WITH ANA DANA BEROŠ (ZAGREB)

**Based in Zagreb, architect and curator Ana Dana Beroš focuses on the creation of uncertain, fragile environments that catalyse social change. Through her interest in architectural theory and experimental design, she co-initiated the Think Space and Future Architecture platforms. In 2014, *Intermundia*, her research project on trans-European migration, was selected as the Wheelwright Prize finalist by Harvard GSD and received a special mention from the jury at the Venice Architecture Biennale. Her recent work includes interviews with international architects and theorists on the politics and poetics of space for Croatian Radio. She is currently curating the Zagreb Actopolis project. Here, in conversation with Léopold Lambert, editor of *The Funambulist*, and John Edom of New South, Ana Dana discusses recent developments in architecture for the control and containment of migrant bodies on the 'Balkan Route' and the ways these reflect fissures in the region's broader political discourses.**

**Léopold Lambert:** Yesterday you presented some films by Matija Kralj and a commentary on your end of a situation currently unfolding in both Slovenia and Croatia, showing how migrant bodies and displaced bodies are being controlled and quite often contained in this particular hotel that you've been looking at. Can you explain this particular situation to us a little, where I think the role of architecture will be quite explicit?

**Ana Dana Beroš:** I can speak about different typologies of detention. What is interesting about what has been happening in Croatia lately, and it has been happening for years now actually, is that defunct hotels are being turned into spaces of detention. Whether it's an obsolete lorry drivers' motel on the highway that was functioning as a centre for illegalised migrants in the last decade, Motel Ježevo, or whether it's a reception

centre for asylum seekers at the very outskirts of the city of Zagreb, Hotel Porin. A defunct motel or hotel in a U-shape can be easily fenced or walled off with an interior courtyard, with people packed inside in larger numbers that can actually fit into such a compound of limited capacity. The movie showed, firstly, the management of bodies in the Dobova transit camp on the Slovenian-Croatian border that has now been closed for two months. The situation on the Balkan Route has been changing so fast in the last couple of months that we can't really keep up with the changes in strategic aid to refugees, or in planning a unified resistance to the European border politics. We're now just looking at the leftovers, erased territories of former camps in Slovenia or in Croatia especially. Now all of the camps are closed in Slovenia, I believe, since the dismantling of Dobova in March or the beginning of April this year. Before, there were 20 to 25 refugee camps in Slovenia, in such a small country of around two million inhabitants. Ever since the opening of the so-called 'Balkan Route', around seven hundred thousand people have transited Croatia and Slovenia into Austria. The film was showing refugees coming into the transit camp of Dobova, the camera focussed at knee height to protect their identities, and showing these armoured bodies that were handling them, as well as some volunteers. It tried to show that in a transit camp or an accommodation camp, there is no possibility for any kind of public space: people are separated by nationality into enclosed sectors. At first Slovenia, and later Croatia also, were only accepting migrants from war-torn countries, such as Afghans, Iraqis and Syrians. All the rest were waiting for readmission back to Croatia on the way to their home countries. Actually, the people in the film, in the scenes shot at night when the soldier is screaming and separating children, from women, from men, were being deported back to Croatia



(1) Ana Dana Beroš participating in the Denkraum, 'Public Space as Survival Strategy' at the 36-hour Factory of Thought / Photograph by Ivar Veermäe. (2&3) Dobova transit camp on the Slovenian-Croatian border, which has a transitory population of 400-800 people each day (12/02/2016). Stills from a film by Matija Kralj featured by Ana Dana Beroš during the 36-hour Factory of Thought.

and were most likely forced to sign documents in Croatian that nobody actually translated for them. Facing deportation they were forced to seek asylum in Croatia. But nobody wants to stay in Croatia, not even 'indigenous' people! After that, there were shots filmed in front of the Hotel Porin, the reception centre for asylum seekers. In fact, the intent of the entire film was to show and to reflect on the 'politics of invisibility', to reflect on the Croatian society, which is supposed to be so homogeneous. According to the last census in 2011, 94 percent of Zagreb's inhabitants are 'pure' Croats and an even larger percentage of people claim that their mother tongue is Croatian, which is an absolute illusion. This social mimicry is interesting because the rates are higher even than during the war years in former Yugoslavia, in 1991. There is a question of how that kind of society can be welcoming and accepting of any kind of cultural difference, when our very 'own' Balkan ethnic and cultural groups are being homogenised. We know from all of the social and architectural work we are doing in Zagreb that this narrative of homogeneity is not true. Even in 2011 and the years before that, before and after the Arab Spring, there were parts of the city that were ghettoised. I am especially referring to areas next to the only mosque in the city of Zagreb, where there has been an increase in Muslim communities, not from the Balkans, but from the Middle East, and that was years before last fall, mid-September 2015, when Hungary closed its borders and refugees started entering Croatia.

**LL:** You mentioned something that I'd like you to expand a little more on, which is the humanitarian violence of hierarchised victim-hoods. The fact that on the Macedonian border with Greece, people who were allowed to go through these humanitarian corridors were selected on the basis of coming from these geographical zones, and therefore fleeing from a particular form of violence, namely the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, completely forgetting the economic violence that can be at work in Sudan or Eritrea, or the more internal forms of violence against Kurdish people for example. But could you go back to this particular moment that you've been showing through Matija's films and of the deportation of bodies, the selection of bodies. Is it only an administrative process through those documents written in Croatian that they are receiving, or is there also a spatial apparatus involved?

**ADB:** Of course there is always a spatial apparatus involved. I remember we were recreating the Dobova camp together with you, Matija and I as architects, because we were only able to circulate around, and not enter the camp grounds during our visit to the border camp. We were too late to get into the volunteer night shift to work with people, but also we were not really psychologically prepared to do so at that particular moment, without having at least passed the Médecins du Monde training in dealing with refugees that was required. Each camp had sectors divided by nationalities of people on the move, and the most difficult part of the work was dealing with people facing deportation. If you talk with any of the volunteers who were in such camps, they will give you the same answer regarding this segregation by nationality: who decides who is the 'right victim' and who is the 'wrong victim'? I know that here in this room, we all agree that any kind of violence is violence, whether war violence or economic violence. In the beginning of the migrant influx into its territory, Croatia opened the borders to everyone and we were happy about the fact that at least there wasn't a border wall erected facing Serbia. In the beginning there were complications on the Croatian-Serbian border that were solved later on, such as transportation of goods and export from Serbia being suspended for a short period. The tensions in the beginning stirred up local antagonisms that run deep in our 'post-Yugoslav' territory. Just to illustrate this, I am a child of a mixed Serbo-Croatian marriage, and I heard yesterday from my mother, that on a visit to Vukovar, the city that was razed to the ground at the beginning of the Croatian War of Independence, someone called her a 'Serbian cunt' in the street. Those tensions are still very much alive, 20 years after the war. Coming back to your question, we were talking about the separation of migrants bodies: I think that the internalised segregation within refugee ethnic groups is terrifying. For instance, I showed footage of the demonstrations in front of the reception centre in Zagreb, and the only person whose face the video clearly portrayed was Hassan. Hassan is an Afghan activist who started volunteering with the group Are You Syrious? It was a tremendous achievement to bring together all the asylum seekers in a struggle for the same cause, for the betterment of living conditions in the reception centre, because before you had to negotiate everything separately with this or that Syrian, with an Iraqi, with a Kurdish Iraqi, or with a Kurdish Syrian. It is

amazing that it's so difficult to help people organise to fight for their own rights. That demonstration happened on the worst possible day, when the Turkish president Erdoğan came to present investment plans in Croatia, when on the same day there was a centennial of the recognition of Islam as a state religion in Croatia and accompanying festivities, with Muslim leaders coming to Zagreb from all over the world. In addition, it was the day when our war veterans, after 555 days of protesting against the former social democratic government in public space, where they erected a huge military tent beside an important arterial road of Zagreb – without permits of course – finally decided to end the protest without their requests having been met by the new government. All these things happened on the same day, completely overshadowing the refugee claims and the claims of the asylum seekers. If we're talking about the media coverage and public opinion on the question of migrants and refugees, it has of course been changing dramatically during the last couple of months, but at the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis Croatia was very much open towards all migrants. It was the pre-election days and each political party was trying to figure out in which way their voting bodies would wish their party to take a statement regarding this burning issue. Later on the openness diminished, so this issue has been swept under the carpet for the moment. Of course, this is partly due to the closing of the Balkan Route, and the situation being 'calmer' with regards to the number of transiting bodies. In the middle of last autumn there were crossings of between five and ten thousand people per day. Croatia was the very first state to organise transportation that was free of charge, but it was also a system of controlling movement, not letting people stray from the designated route. It was a case of 'secure' transport from point A to point B. We would greet the refugees with open arms, help them make a swift and safe passage through Croatia, and see them off with a lunch box into Slovenia, into the Schengen Area. Today everything has stopped. The footage shows the reception centre where there are allegedly 300 to 350 people located. The State's plan is to narrow these numbers down, leaving only single men in Zagreb, and to move refugee families seeking asylum to the provincial town of Kutina, located 80 km south-east of Zagreb.

**John Edom:** I'd like to ask you, against the backdrop of these transitory and diverse antagonisms

that are taking place, to reflect back on the statement that you submitted for the conference, regarding the idea that conflict is so imminent in this idea of public space and that what is needed is to establish grounds for negotiations rather than elaborate the grounds to affirm what is already common. Can I ask you to reflect back on this idea?

**ADB:** At the end of the video there was footage taken just a couple of days ago, prior to this conference on public space and survival strategies within it, trying to show the roots, the seeds of possible future urban conflict and negotiations between the newcomers and the locals. You saw a fenced off basketball court and a yard with a sign saying 'private.' That court is just in front of the reception centre, an old hotel next to the administrative building of the Croatian Railways, and its rail yard, inside the industrial zone at the periphery of Zagreb. So how, in this particular lot, next to a huge car park, next to these two public buildings, could this be private property? Who is taking the territory and demarcating it as somebody's own, and on what grounds? At first when you go there you see a few children playing, maybe riding bikes – I'm talking about asylum seekers – and you see the territorial conflict not just as a property issue but as a racial statement. However, the truth is more complex because that particular lot is located within a road corridor where the ownership of the land is not at all clear. One family, in ideal terms, shares their property with the City of Zagreb, meaning that the land cannot be divided. In a way, this particular case of a privatised basketball court is just a test ground to bring the topic of negotiating the public space and its 'ownership' to the forefront, to discuss it with the legal owners, with the officials of the reception centre, but, importantly, also with the people residing in the Hotel Porin. It is just the very first expression – and impression – of a city that is non-welcoming toward asylum seeking communities. As I told you, people are placed on the outskirts of the city without a possibility of access to means of public transportation. In that sense, the usage of the overall public space of the city is completely denied. Even though we are talking about a reception centre for asylum seekers, which means that it's under curfew, a semi-prison situation, not a detention centre, there are numerous invisible borders around that building that are difficult to cross.





Hotel Porin in Zagreb: reception centre for asylum seekers. (1) Asylum forms in Croatian (16/03/2016). (2) Protests for better living conditions for asylum seekers (27/04/2016). (3) View over the railway and the asylum centre on the periphery of Zagreb (16/05/2016). All images are stills from a film by Matija Kralj featured by Ana Dana Beroš during the 36-hour Factory of Thought.



Hotel Porin in Zagreb: reception centre for asylum seekers. (1&2) Interior courtyard of the centre (16/05/2016). (3) Immediate neighbourhood of the reception centre with a fenced off basketball court (16/05/16). All images are stills from a film by Matija Kralj featured by Ana Dana Beroš during the 36-hour Factory of Thought.

# FAKE CITIES, FICTION CITIES, FICTITIOUS CITIES

KATHRIN RÖGGLA (BERLIN)

**Kathrin Röggla is a Berlin-based journalist and author. She has published novels and prose works, including most recently *die alarmbereiten* (2010), as well as collections of essays such as *Die falsche Frage. Über Theater, Politik und die Kunst, das Fürchten nicht zu verlernen* (2015). In addition to writing radio and theatre plays, she has directed a documentary on risk management. She has received numerous awards for her literary works, most recently the Arthur Schnitzler Prize (2012). Kathrin is a member of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (German Academy for Language and Literature), and a member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, and since 2015 has been the organisation's Vice President. Her latest collection *Nachtsendung. Unheimliche Geschichten* is due to be published by S. Fischer in autumn 2016. Presented here are a series of extracts from an essay published in German by the Hundertvierzehn online literary magazine, run by the S. Fischer publishing house.**

[...] If I had been asked to define public space a few years ago, I would have said that it is the bit which never quite fits into a photo. Whether a playground or main square, somehow there is always a corner out of shot, a part missing. Nowadays, the desire to accommodate places in photos is a thing of the past, the urge of an ageing – very quickly ageing – generation. In any case, the only photos taken today are selfies, which no longer show any space, or any more space than that which serves as adornment for your social media presence. [...]

The political space of those days has become a stage for self-promotion and pure gesture politics. And since today's politics appears to be dissolving into pure gesture, its space is an ornament,

a non-place which vanishes into postcard format. "The economy will take care of the rest," one might say. Yet now, Berlin's Pariser Platz has only a few private sector signs; not even graffiti in the new grass-roots style now so common in the city, which is really just advertising for major corporations. It is becoming progressively clear that the political emphasis on public space in the city can hardly be present 'in reality' at this location and, above all, can never be divorced from its marketability. [...]

Twenty years ago, Dutch-American sociologist Saskia Sassen was already pointing out the mistake of believing that power does not need its centres. That story has been narrated time and again in Frankfurt, London, and Berlin – although in Berlin admittedly only as a six-storey version. Yet twenty years ago, the debate was more focused on fake cities, camouflaged architecture and the culture of façades, and concealed security systems: in the streets outside Pariser Platz's embassies, retractable bollards can be lowered into the ground, and even when an authorised person passes through the public square, there is hidden CCTV surveillance trained upon them. Today, we have less fake cities than fiction cities, and public space is less prettified, trivialised or phony than it is event-related, experience-oriented space, dragged into a planned dramaturgy by a city marketing agency, even if the plan is never fully realised. We live at a time when it is not only political agendas that require a strong narrative: our European fiction cities are locked into an ongoing competition to attract tourists and must work with dramaturgies to make the city experienceable, as if otherwise it would be nothing more than an architectural wasteland. Nonetheless, the 'Be Berlin' image campaign run under Berlin's former Governing Mayor Klaus Wowereit did catch on. Design and flow markets, the beat of the party vibe in the green spaces along the Landwehr canal, all made possible by

Easyjet tourism, 'Berlin' as a presentist attitude to life, entirely today, totally NOW. Public space as the consumer merchandise for tourists.

By and large, one might say that fiction – originally the domain of writers – has drifted into the political sphere and can be found in the marketing departments and lobby organisations that translate the symbolic work of politics into narrative or counter-narrative: the raw material of the new gesture politics. In public space, such fictionalisation is supported by the fact that it has a double aspect, in both the real and digital worlds. It is mediated *per se*. Just as in the media realm, public space is permeated by the structure of the rumour, something we are all taught by our WhatsApp and Twitter society. In terms of information, this is an ambivalent form of public communication that rather than simply empowering individuals, also constantly orchestrates overwrites, fictionalisations and phantasms. Its polyphony is rendered in all allegories – for good reason – as the face of a monster, and not as a lifeline or statue of liberty. At least not in Germany. The Facebook society expresses itself spatially in flash-mobs and spontaneous events: its new personnel are guerrilla clowns and private security guards.

This form of fictionalising is also sensitive because it does not easily allow its removal from the functions of the market economy, rapidly implemented over the last decades. From inscribing the market model in public space, privatising public transport services and municipal utilities, and transforming local authorities with their own branding logic, it was just a small step to the golden age of delegating responsibility, chains of contractors and sub-contractors, and the decisive basis for a new security architecture. De-regulation creates gaps that must be constantly filled by civic participation. This was the dawn of the grand age of construction scandals, accompanied by many instances of temporary use and grass-roots housing activists taking over empty buildings. The effect, during the second phase of the urbanism debate of the mid-1990s, was the transformation of the city into a machine for identifying post-democratic conditions. Political party sleaze, policy dictated by self-interest and, above all, delegation of responsibility. It is also interesting to see how this fictionalisation connects with the new security regime. If one wanted to design a negative narrative for cities, London would certainly provide the template for a focal point of CCTV, Washington the central server

of paranoid bugging madness, and Paris – but increasingly Frankfurt, Vienna and Munich as well – home to spatial stagnation created by a rapacious real estate market, while the capital of caretakers and tinkerers rapidly advances toward becoming the capital of burnout. [...] Below this arc between deregulated security regimes, private sector real estate speculation and civil society involvement in the heart of a city increasingly shaped in equal parts by touristification and involuntary migration, the dream of participation and stake-holding is not yet over. [...]

In 2003, when Michael Moore gave his now legendary speech on the fictitious times in which we were living, the Iraq War was the Fall of an on-going permanent military deployment in the Near and Middle East, accompanied by a drastic media war in which embedded journalism and war games, Hollywood fiction and eyewitness mobile phone footage all played their part. Today, social fiction is moving all too close to the fictitious, and it too supports the bundling together of imaginary ideas and their propulsion along a particular trajectory: a fantasied and narrated tectonic construction of the imaginary, which must be meticulously examined.

Urban fiction is neither simply related to an ensemble, nor only to an individual building, but rather lives on possible uses of space. [...] Perhaps we need a little more purposeful non-fiction, though maybe what is required is more a case of taking another look at exactly who is telling which stories and when, and making this background more visible. In this process, the question of which spaces overlap – and how – will be increasingly asked. Just as fictive spaces push themselves into real spaces, or fiction pushes itself into counter-fiction, so too competing, conflicting models of space can be created. [...]

This is why our urban fiction cannot be allowed to be concluded, but needs its openings to be set precisely. I once sketched the image of the reverse repair workshop, freely adapted from Richard Sennett's book *Together*, a model that could stand just as much for the arts as for public space. As artists, we develop something that is in need of repair and send it out towards the audience. One thing is for sure, public space must always remain in a state of disrepair, requiring attention, since only then can it continue to work.

*Translated from German by Andrew Boreham.*

## CONTESTED SPACE IN THE CITY CONVERSATION WITH PEDRO GADANHO (LISBON)

**Curator, writer and architect Pedro Gadanho is the Director of MAAT, the new Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology in Lisbon. Previously a curator of contemporary architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, he curated exhibitions such as 9+1 Ways of Being Political, Uneven Growth, Endless House and A Japanese Constellation. Pedro Gadanho, who holds an MA in art and architecture and a PhD in architecture and mass media, is also the former editor of BEYOND bookazine, writes the Shrapnel Contemporary blog, and regularly contributes to international publications. He is the author of Arquitetura em Público, and a recipient of the 2012 FAD Prize for Thought and Criticism. Here, in conversation with Meriem Chabani and John Edom of New South, Pedro discusses his thoughts on the differing roles of architects, designers and curators as enablers for – and critics of – political appropriations of public space.**

**John Edom:** First of all, I wanted to ask you about an aspect of the statement on Fights and Fictions in relation to public space that you submitted prior to the event, and that you then elaborated in your Denkraum presentation: your observation that the redesign of Tahrir Square has stripped it of any potential to trigger or accommodate a spontaneous demonstration. I want to ask – and perhaps this could be a conclusion that comes out of this – should we expect the State to provide spaces for dissent against it, irrespective of how progressive that state is?

**Pedro Gadanho:** Well, it's not the role of the State to provide space for dissent against itself, but I would say that it's the role of people to try and find the cracks and find the spaces where they can express their dissent. I think, on the contrary, that

the State is always worried about controlling urban space in terms of design, as in Haussmann's interventions in Paris. It's worried about controlling those kinds of spaces that could originate mass movements and demonstrations that can have a specific expression within the city. But what I do think is interesting is that even if the State tries to regulate those spaces, people will always find a way – or we hope that they will always find a way – to appropriate these spaces and make them their own, instead of just being imposed upon them. This is basically what Michel de Certeau was writing about in the 1970s: talking about colonialism, but also about expressions of playfulness within the city, so as to subvert those orders that were imposed on everyday dwellers. These impositions have always been present in western societies, and were then imposed on other societies as well. So my hope is that the State, or even designers – and that was one of my points yesterday – actually do not always manage to determine perfectly the function of a certain space. Because if, as in a sort of modernist credo, you go along with this idea that you could perfectly determine how spaces are used, then you are limiting those possibilities of appropriation. I think that it's designers themselves, even when they are not precisely aligned with the State, who should be aware of this possibility of leaving space for appropriation, rather than determining every use and every possibility that a space can have. I think that fortunately we have overcome that modernist moment in which functionalism became a dictum that had to be followed in every sense. But there is always the risk of falling back into that kind of temptation.

**JE:** The creativity that comes even from the decision to stage a mass protest – whether it's spontaneous or organised – is perhaps enabled by the space where it happens being resistant to it: there's a creativity against something. In order to



(1) Pedro Gadanho. / Photograph by David Faran. (2) Exhibition '9 + 1 Ways of Being Political: 50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design' at the New York Museum of Modern Art curated by Pedro Gadanho. / Photograph by Pedro Gadanho (2012). (3) COSMO MoMA PS1 by Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation. / Photograph Miguel de Guzmán (2015).

design a space which allows protest to take place, must it have resistance built into it, as part of the negotiation that you were just talking about?

**PG:** Yes, or a critical discourse if you want, or at least an ability to play several roles at the same time, i.e. to also carry a critical message in the way you design. I don't think this is easy. This was one of the themes that we tried to explore in the *Ways of Being Political* show at the Museum of Modern Art, by talking about iconoclasm or institutional critique. It's very difficult for architects – because they still work for clients, unless they leave the role of the client behind – to actually bite the hand that feeds them. This is where the subversive element or the critical element has more difficulty in coming through, because people are trying to respond to a certain commission or a certain demand and might find it difficult to do that and yet also produce a certain level of criticism. But I think that is a kind of subtlety that can be built into a project; the architectural project, the spatial project.

**Meriem Chabani:** I had a question regarding some remarks you made during the Denkraum yesterday: that you were very aware of fascism and also, subsequently, of the political role of architecture and architects. What I was wondering was, as a curator, do you consider that you only have the possibility to create a comment on a given condition, or do you also have the tools to possibly fight back?

**PG:** I think so. Because you can use institutional spaces that are made to produce discourse, exhibitions and – as we said today – other acts of speech, and provide those platforms for people to have certain conditions of work that they wouldn't have in a commercial market. This questioning of the commercial drive of the profession is very important because if – like it is very clear in the United States – that becomes the only and main drive of the activity of the architect then you are left with very little space to really provide a critical way of thinking. But I think institutions do have the responsibility to offer that stage and to create the possibilities, even through competitions, through fictions of potential projects, to facilitate that kind of activity and make it more public. Because this is also the dimension that I was talking about, which I think is important, which is the fact that you can actually maximise the audience and go beyond small circles where political commentary and critical thought are circulating, and then enable your-

self to reach other audiences that are probably just mesmerised by television, football and other popular entertainments as we know them today. It is important to break in into these fields and to expand and reveal the richness of the critical thought that may emerge from a spatial practice. I think this is a possibility for certain institutions and I think it is crucial that they don't lose sight of such responsibility. That's why at a certain point I was talking about the museum as activist or as activator. The museum as the possibility to establish that platform. I think that many curators have realised that role is possible, and have assumed that role. I remember arriving in London, at the V&A at a certain point last year, and seeing this exhibition on political demonstrations, the kinds of tools that people built, the kinds of designs they used to support these manifestations, and these were being shown in a very popular context. Many people were visiting, and perhaps they were surprised to see these kinds of contents in a very traditional museum.

**MC:** You mentioned that architecture should strive to get closer to art and fiction in order to reach a broader audience. I wonder if that might not also come back and bite us, because architects have a tendency, similarly found in the art world, to codification. Even when we are producing fictions, and even when we are striving to appeal to a broader audience, we do tend to use some cryptic forms of expression and narratives. Do you think it can actually restrict the scope of the public that you can reach?

**PG:** Well that is the art of good communication! And you need to improve on that art generally. When I had this project called *Beyond: Short Stories of the Post-Contemporary*, the notion was precisely to underline that there are so many good ideas, so many incredible analyses, so much stuff going on in the world of architecture that doesn't reach a broader audience. The idea was that indeed maybe you had to – not necessarily simplify it – but transform that content so it would carry the message, in disguise, or surrounded by other forms of conception that are more popular. It was saying that, indeed, writers have been doing this all along; producing critical thought, complex thought, and then transforming it by the way of a simple story that reaches very different audiences on different levels. Of course, things are codified, but I believe that the best works of art, like Umberto Eco said at some point, would be the ones

that manage to speak to both a sophisticated audience and also to a popular audience. That is, depending on the language of the spectator or the consumer, they will have different effects. I think the relationship to fiction, for me, comes precisely from that role that I mentioned yesterday, of literature always being a critical tool when society is missing the point of certain transformations, or not understanding the consequences of certain evolutions. I think literature has been one of the first forms of art to always be concerned with those problems and then also with the problem of translating them for a broader audience. The goal, even in a spatial intervention, would be to go beyond producing a mere opinion and build this complex thought into stories that can disturb, that can enter another realm of understanding.

**JE:** Yesterday, you mentioned that you are perhaps in a moment of doubt in your career as a curator, about the role of your work. How will you approach your role as the director of the new MAAT in Lisbon and, just as a kind of tag-on question, has what you've heard so far at the 36 hour Factory of Thought provided any answers to your questions?

**PG:** Well, I think the Factory of Thought has produced more doubt than answers...

**JE:** Which is good?

**PG:** Which is good, exactly! Because it means that it makes you go deeper into your doubts and possibly understand what they mean. My doubts are not precisely about my work as curator, because that evolves organically. They are more about the way architects can have an impact with the work they do when responding to social crisis, economic evolutions and so on. Because I think architects nowadays are pretty quick to try to respond and think about these issues, at least theoretically. But then it's much more difficult to actually have a practice that has an effective impact. Especially because, as we know, it's still within political systems that decisions are made, and architects have very little interference with those sorts of decisions. This being said, I do think that through culture you can have a role in at least triggering thought, triggering concern in respect to certain situations. I consider that MAAT, the new museum that I'm working on, is an opportunity – as being at the Museum of Modern Art was as well – to reach other kinds of audiences. Maybe I'm in

a moment of transition going from concerns about architecture and how architecture communicates its intentions and its critical thinking, to that of the world of art, and trying to retain something of what I see as a common thread between art and architecture, in terms of responding to transformations in urban culture, the impact of technology and so on. My idea is that the role of a curator is as a sort of seismographer or searcher of content, that by way of a selection and of putting together certain things we can enter a certain dialogue and trigger certain ideas. I travel a lot and see a lot of things, collect different objects, different discourses, different ideas, and then make them collide in one space. Of course this has been done in past situations, but I still see most museums working more on continuing a sort of art-historical approach, in which I'm not at all interested. I'm much more interested in how the work of both artists and architects is actually expressing very clear ideas about what is going on around us.

WHEN BODIES GATHER AND OCCUPY  
NUIT DEBOUT (PARIS)



(1&2) General assembly at Nuit Debout, Place de la République, Paris. (3) Sign at Nuit Debout. / All photographs by Léopold Lambert (05/04/2016).



(1&2) General assembly at Nuit Debout on the Place de la République in Paris. (2) "Vive la Commune", graffiti in reference to the 1871 Paris Commune. (3) "We Are Many, We Can Do Anything", graffiti at Nuit Debout / All photographs by Léopold Lambert (05/04/2016-09/04/2016).

# LETTER TO THE EDITORS

## ETHEL BARAONA POHL (BARCELONA)

**Ethel Baraona Pohl is a critic, writer and curator currently based in Barcelona. She is co-founder of the architectural research practice and independent publishing house dpr-barcelona with César Reyes Nájera. Ethel was associate curator of *Adhocrcacy*, first commissioned for the Istanbul Design Biennial in 2012 and later exhibited in New York and London. She co-curated the third Think Space programme *Money* in 2013 and *Adhocrcacy ATHENS* at the Onassis Cultural Center in 2015. In this letter to the editors, Ethel collects her thoughts on the 36-hour Factory of Thought, offering a critical reflection on the event and calling for a more proactive, less confrontational approach to the way we formulate public space as practitioners.**

Dear Léopold, Meriem and John,

Thank you for inviting me to contribute to this publication, following the interesting 36-hour Factory of Thought: Public Space. Fights and Fictions. I must admit that I have started this text several times since you commissioned it – going back and forth over the blank page – but I couldn't find a proper way to wrap up all the blurry, dizzy ideas and inputs that inhabit my mind nowadays. So I decided to use the form of a letter because it has a more personal tone, like a close encounter with old friends. A letter allows the sharing of concerns that resonate in our common discussions – via mail, social networks and face-to-face conversations – instead of trying to elaborate large and complex theories that have already been developed by numerous practitioners and thinkers in endless essays written during the past recent years; all sincere and deep attempts to understand the complexities of that space that we are here calling 'public'.

One of the most refreshing things about the format of the 36-hour Factory of Thought was that the many interesting debates were always followed by mind blowing conversations over food or drinks, 'the b-sides' of

the event, which in my personal opinion were the most enriching moments: when nobody was presenting and everybody felt comfortable and free to share more personal opinions, leaving aside stage fright and the fear of being judged by your words. Thus, after trying to digest the mass of information, thoughts and different notions exchanged and compressed into 36 hours, I felt that it would not be possible, either by reviewing the notes in my notebook or by rereading all the material on the event website, to summarize precisely what public space is nowadays and why we consider it the proper place for fights and fictions to happen.

Something that immediately comes to my mind when reconsidering the contents of the event is Foucault's statement: "We need to escape the dilemma of being either for or against. One can, after all, be face to face, and upright. Working with a government doesn't imply either a subjection or a blanket acceptance. One can work and be intransigent at the same time. I would even say that the two things go together." My general feeling after all the lectures and debates is that we are all against something; a general sense of discontent, focused mainly on the current economic and political powers that are shaping – or reshaping – public space. The opening set of discussions were focused on the fact that public space is the subject of progressive militarisation, privatisation, surveillance, and so on. This is something that we of course cannot deny. As an example, we could evoke the current situation in Turkey, where just a few days ago, after an unsuccessful coup d'état was staged, the president himself urged the public to occupy public space in protest against the coup. The fact that a politician – President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – urged people to take to the streets and 'fight back', just a few years after he had repressed those same people when they took to the streets and 'fought back' against the seizure of Gezi Park, can be seen as a sad paroxysm of how easily a fiction can be accepted as reality, and to what extent political maneuvers are related to the notion of public space.

In follow up to this example, we have seen in recent years how conflicts related to 'terrorism' – whatever that might mean – are transforming every square metre of our cities into surveilled space, through the implementation of global security networks and the presence of a body of armed police; spaces where all of us, guided by a sense of mutual suspicion and our constant use of prosthetic networked devices, have become voluntary prisoners in our own cities. Fear has been demonstrated to function as a perfect tool for political and economic power: fear controls, fear justifies increased expenditure to further militarise our cities, fear legitimates greater investment in surveillance infrastructure. Fear of the other, fear of the different, fear of other languages, other foods, other cultural expressions. Fear of newcomers. Our fear induces us to meekly accept a discourse of 'protection.' The fiction of fear plays out in public space, where we are in contact with others; no matter if in a square, a metro station or a shopping mall, we feel more secure if we know there is someone watching (over) us.

Throughout the program of the 36-hour Factory of Thought, public space was often described as the space for revolt, a site for action, or the place for political dissensus. The political rhetorics of the Western world are based on the dilemma mentioned by Foucault of being either for or against, and are used to justify action or inaction accordingly: one almost identical political party against another, #Brexit against immigration and 'dictatorial' oversight by the EU, urban protesters against the political system, the army against the terrorists, and so on and so on. But what if we were to analyse this rhetoric of refusal in the other direction? It is not difficult to be self critical and accept that these rhetorics and discourses have colonised our minds, and now – from the other side of the mirror – we often hear and resort to statements that are based on them: struggles, protest, and revolutionary attempts are always 'against' something. Against the status quo, neo-liberal power and its economic policies, or the underlying financialisation of the welfare system, amongst other examples. This binary system recalled by Frederic Jameson's words on Nietzschean philosophy: "The good is ourselves and the people like us, the evil is other people in their radical difference from us (of whatever type)."

Recently I was reading an essay by Boris Groys, where he wrote something that is so essential that sometimes we tend to forget it: "Public space is the space where we have the experience of being exposed, exhibited to the public gaze, being publicized, becoming a part of the public." Accordingly, we can say that public space has always existed, in any place where a small group of

people gather together. But we should remember that specifically designated 'public space' – as we know it today – was created by the bourgeoisie: firstly, during the 17th century, as the place for popular spectacles, where monuments to political power acted as benevolent reminders of who controlled the city; and more recently as the places through which to retain control over certain parts of the city, in the form of mediated space, privately owned public spaces, 'Secured by Design', and so on. But merely being aware of all this is not enough.

Awareness is positive insofar as it can be catalyst for action. All these concerns bring to mind the clarity of Jacques Rancière: "The political struggle is also the struggle for the appropriation of words." The current political system has appropriated the concept of public space as something private, owned by the State and we have accepted the same discourse, as is apparent when we speak in the same terms: 'fighting for,' 'occupying what is ours,' 'owning or having the right to this and that.' Perhaps what we need is to stop using the same language and to appropriate other words to give new meanings and new values to public space. What would happen if, instead of framing public space as a space for claiming ownership or enacting revolt, we name public space as the space for emancipation, for encounters, for interactions, or – as Nana Adusei-Poku mentioned during the 36-hour Factory of Thought – for nurturing? Spaces where political acts are intertwined with human responsibility? Spaces for play and having fun?

Every time I go out to take a walk and look around, I like to imagine that we might act like children who do not ask permission to suddenly drop to the ground and begin to play together uninhibitedly. We need to invent – or perhaps simply rediscover – new ways of using public space as it is supposed to be: a realm where we can be together. A space to negotiate how to share that space and time with others rather than to make claims 'against each other.' A renunciation of the traditional notions that we have learnt and, until now, uncritically put into practice.

As Rainer Maria Rilke said, in a strong but simple way: "The real homeland is the childhood."

Sincerely yours,  
Ethel Baraona Pohl  
18 July 2016

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The 36-hour Factory of Thought: a few of the contributors and participants. / All photographs by Ivar Veermäe.

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(1) Léopold Lambert (left) and John Edom. (2) Meriem Chabani / Photographs New South. (3) Joanne Pouzenc. (4) Johannes Odenthal (right). (5) Andrea Zell (left). (6) Julia Albani (centre). / All photographs by Ivar Veermäe.

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New South is a Paris-based research platform founded by architects and urban planners – including Meriem Chabani and John Edom, co-editors of this publication – who share a desire to promote cultural, architectural and artistic initiatives in – and of – the Global South. New South aims to actively question the position of architects in a globalised context, between reappropriation of local knowledge and contemporary visions. [newsouth.fr](http://newsouth.fr)

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**Public Space: Fights and Fictions**

**36-hour Factory of Thought**

**19 May 2016 (Prologue), Noon 20 May – Midnight 21 May 2016**

**Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 10557 Berlin, Germany**  
[adk.de/fights-and-fictions](http://adk.de/fights-and-fictions)

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# PUBLIC SPACE: FIGHTS AND FICTIONS

AN EDITORIAL PROJECT BY:  
**THE FUNAMBULIST**

&



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&

