

# LOBBY

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## Defiance





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# LOBBY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Regner Ramos

ART DIRECTOR Moa Pärup GRAPHIC DESIGNER Maël Fournier-Comte

## EDITORIAL

The Exhibition Space \_\_\_\_\_ Regner Ramos  
The Seminar Room \_\_\_\_\_ James Taylor-Foster  
The Lift \_\_\_\_\_ Marcela Aragüez  
The Staircase \_\_\_\_\_ Laura Narvaez  
The Library \_\_\_\_\_ Stylianos Giamarelos  
The Toilets \_\_\_\_\_ Mrinal S. Rammohan

Editorial Assistants Miranda Critchley, Theo Jones,  
Yoranda Kassanou, Daniel Stilwell

**Contributing Writers** David Adjaye, Gregorio Astengo, Eray Cayli, Brendan Cormier, Miranda Critchley, Darren Deane, Francesca dell'Aglia, Killian Doherty, Nnamdi Elleh, Julia Feix, Sophie Hamer, Helen Kearney, Jon Lopez, Marianne Kodaira-Matthews, William McMahon, Tarek Merlin, Maryam Mudhaffar, Phuong-Tram Nguyen, Hikaru Nuisance, Uroš Pajović, Amanda Palasik, Mark Pimlott, Stefan Popa, PUG, Evan Rawn, Ryan Ross, Rohan Varma, Laura Vaughan

**Photographers** Thomas Adank, Gustav Almestål | LundLund, Kevin Creaney, Miranda Critchley, David Cross, Killian Doherty, Nnamdi Elleh, Simon García, Stylianos Giamarelos, Mikael Gregorsky, Yoranda Kassanou, Marianne Matthews, Maryam Mudhaffar, Stefan Cristian Popa, Regner Ramos, Evan Rawn, Jane Rendell, Lewis Ronald, Ryan Ross, Arturo Soto, Loukas Triantis, Vasilis Vasiliadis, Christina Vasilopoulou

**Illustrators** Samra Avdagic, Maël Fournier-Comte, OMMX, PUG

**Cover Illustration** João Fazenda

**Contributing Editor** Nahed Jawad-Chakouf

**Social Media Manager** Regner Ramos

**Online Editors** Stylianos Giamarelos, Mrinal S. Rammohan, Regner Ramos, James Taylor-Foster

**Marketing Manager** Yoranda Kassanou

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The Bartlett School  
of Architecture  
140 Hampstead Road  
London NW1 2BX  
info@bartlettlobby.com

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“When  
your ideas  
shatter  
established  
thought,  
expect  
blowback.”

TIM FARGO

## Contributors

In the Bible's book of 'Samuel', David—a young teenager—defeats a fully-armoured Goliath by simply slinging a stone onto the warrior giant's forehead. For this issue we asked four of our most outstanding contributors: **Nowadays, what overlooked tool would you use to defeat your 'Goliath'?**

### Samra Avdagic



**Contributing Illustrator**  
samraavdagic.tumblr.com

Samra is a 23 year-old design student from Norway. She currently studies at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design and works as a freelance illustrator. Samra also writes a design-based column for Norwegian online magazine *Pjong!*. When not doing any of these things, she usually spends her time watching movies from her *501 Must-See Movies* book and drinking way too much coffee. We found Samra via our Instagram account months ago, and we've not been able to let her go ever since. Apart from doing illustrations for bartlettlobby.com (including our summer-inspired iPhone wallpapers), Samra's work for this issue can be seen on page 32, 34 and 47 of the Exhibition Space, and page 130 of the Library.

**"My tool would be a bra with sequins on the sides and plastic straps. Try wearing it for a whole day. Not comfortable. Everything itches and pinches. I would force it on Goliath—he probably wouldn't last long."**

### Mikael Gregorsky



**Contributing Photographer**  
mikaelgregorsky.com

Mikael is a Swedish-born visual artist. Currently based in London, he studied at the University of Westminster earning a BSc and an MA in Photography. He has since exhibited and worked on projects in the UK and abroad. Mikael has photographed the likes of Robyn, Florence Welch and Marina Abramović; with his impressive experience shooting portraits of celebrated figures, for this issue we invited him to—in true Gregorsky-style—shoot some beautiful and edgy portraits of one of our main features and exemplars of 'Defiance', Carme Pinós. You can see the portraits on pages 54 and 59 of the Exhibition Space.

**"White vinegar. Excellent to use around the house—cleaning, cooking, anything. Don't use chemicals, they're bad for the environment!"**

### Miranda Critchley



**Editorial Assistant**  
@mccritchley

Miranda has just started the MA in Architectural History at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Although she works as a freelance researcher and editor, Miranda wanted to spend more time writing about architectural history and politics, so we hauled her on board for LOBBY. On a quirkier note, Miranda is interested in prison architecture, but she's never been arrested. Not only has Miranda been a dream at helping getting the articles for this issue and for bartlettlobby.com ready, but she's also written two articles for 'Defiance'. Find them in pages 66–68 of the Exhibition Space and on pages 141–148 of the Toilets.

**"A British Library reader card—I'd be a knowledgeable opponent."**

### Gregorio Astengo



**Contributing Writer**

Gregorio is an Italian architect and historian, who graduated from Turin's Polytechnic. In 2013 he moved to the UK in search of rigorously creative ways to look at architectural history, and is currently a PhD student in Architectural History and Theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture. His interests involve the systems of production and communication of architectural knowledge, and histories of science and art in early-modern times (and tennis). Intelligent, sharp and armed with bilingualism, we commissioned Gregorio to conduct the interview with a fellow Italian-speaker: our main feature for the issue, Mario Botta. His interview can be found in pages 24–31 of the Exhibition Space.

**"A pen. In an age when quick communication is the norm and an overwhelming flow of information is our daily bread, the prosaic and mundane pen has the simple power to slow down time. It forces you to focus on here and now and goes against our crushing need for multitasking and constant data overload. I do believe that the pen can still be mightier than the sword."**



# Through the Cracks

Dear Reader,

A few months ago, I opened one of the cabinet doors in my kitchen to prepare breakfast. As I shuffled through my messy lower shelf, I noticed that right there, behind the barbecue, olive oil and rum bottles (odd combination, I know), an old, forgotten onion had grown a green sprout. The lack of sunlight, soil and humidity had obviously not deterred the vegetable—which I assumed was dead (like I *assume* all my food is)—from relentlessly doing its absolute best to show me how wrong I was. I should say, I can barely keep my cactus alive, so this seemed awfully ironic; also, I was under the impression that flora needed sunlight to survive. Clearly I'm no botanist.

In the dark solitude of my kitchen cabinet, the onion defiantly refused to give up—not because it had a perseverant personality, but because it was simply not in its nature. Loaded with adverse connotations, 'defiance'—I feel—gets a bad rap. 'Defiance' is not synonymous to 'irreverence': the former is about *ideals*, not about lack of respect or empathy. Something or someone is defiant when they fail to follow a pre-established norm because it goes against the very fiber of their being. At their core, those labeled as 'defiant' are different from the status quo and demand—whether actively or passively—to be heard; their presence does not go unnoticed.

For our third issue, this is what we wanted to discuss, and it's who wanted to talk to, using LOBBY as a forum to highlight their stories: people whose roots, like trees growing next to asphalt, strongly and defiantly make cracks on seemingly firm, concrete surfaces. People who, like pesky weeds, keep growing even when someone has tried to rip them off the ground.

We start with the Batwa—a community of hunter-gatherers forced to leave their homes in the Rwandan forests and assimilate a more 'modern' way of living. Still looking to the African continent, we then reach out to Tanzania-born David Adjaye, whose celebrated architectural practice is turning heads everywhere he goes. We also meet architecture icon Carme Pinós

and talk to her about what it's like to—alongside a team of just 15—lead one of Spain's most esteemed architecture firms, not to mention one of the very few internationally visible practices with a woman at the helm. But it is perhaps our conversation with the legendary Mario Botta that gives Exhibition Space its *coup de grâce*; here we talk to a man whose words resonate with the historical legacy of his teachers, Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier, even if it makes him—in his own words—"unfashionable."

A look into our Seminar Room takes us back to 1989, when superstars Pink Floyd shook all of Venice in an unforgettable concert over the water. In the Lift, our rogue explorers venture from the Mediterranean Sea to the southeast corner of the Arabic peninsula, rethinking the role of history in the experience and development of each of the four cities they visited. Going to the Staircase—amidst the bombing of Hiroshima and the gravity-defying ski-jumper—we discuss architectural intersections with film, sports and fashion. In the Library, we come across *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, a 19th Century book written by James De Mille narrating how an act of defiance turned an ordinary man into a venerated deity, while the Toilets looks to the nomenclature of London's most notorious buildings and questions whether their frivolity is the result of cheesy names or lacklustre designs.

In our most inspired issue yet—both in terms of the quality of its phenomenal contributors as well as in the stunning collection of images we've commissioned—I hope that LOBBY No.3's pages show that amidst political and social strain, anyone can give the finger. But surfacing through the cracks, forging your own path and standing tall—or maybe just finding the strength to grow a sprout when the sun's no longer shining? That's defiance.

Enjoy the issue,

Regner Ramos, Editor-in-Chief

Photography: Regner Ramos.



**“The most  
courageous  
act is still  
to think  
for yourself.  
Aloud.”**

COCO CHANEL

*Untitled Photo (Mountain child shooting slingshot from porch of his home. Near Buckhorn, Kentucky). Marion Post Walcott, 1940. All following photos taken from: Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Rights Advisory: No known restrictions on publication. (This page) LC-USF33-031095-M1 [P&P].*











(Previous page) Library of Congress, LC-USF33-031095-M4 (b&w film nitrate neg.) (This page) Library of Congress, LC-USF33-031095-M3 (b&w film nitrate neg.)

**“When  
you’re  
strong and  
good, then  
you’re  
Bad.”**

MICHAEL JACKSON





# The Exhibition Space

Photography: Yvanda Kassanov.



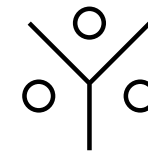
# Extreme



Words and Photography by Killian Doherty

# Citizenship

RECONCEPTUALISING THE DWELLING  
WITHIN THE LANDSCAPES OF RWANDA



“Where would you live tomorrow if there were no laws in Rwanda?” I ask an indigenous community who not only live on the edges of a forest, but of contemporary Rwandan society itself. Writhing in their chairs the community interviewees grinned at one another simultaneously and break into laughter. Their Chief looks at me incredulously and says, “Tomorrow? We would go back to the forest, for that is where all the food is!”

Straddling the borders that intersect the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Rwanda, forests were home to this hunter-gatherer community, who are known as the Batwa. This was until Rwandan laws—influenced by conservationist rhetoric stemming from development programmes—evicted them, separating them from their former livelihoods and in turn forbidding them to identify as a distinct ethnic group. Since then, many of the Batwa lived close to the edges of the forest in makeshift grass thatched huts (grass or ‘Nyakatsi’ as it is known locally is readily available as material and has since become

an adjective for poverty itself). In 2010, a Rwandan ‘shelter task force’ called ‘Bye Bye Nyakatsi’ demolished many of the ‘Nyakatsi’ homes, replacing them with corrugated metal roofs houses. There are about 30,000 Batwa in Rwanda today who’ve been affected by such evictions.

Reflecting on their former life in the forests, we sit outside the Batwa’s new homes topped with government approved sheet metal roofing. These are homes they’ve openly defied in the past through physical destruction: timber windows and doors were removed, broken down and used as firewood. Stored drinking water harvested from these roofs has been syphoned off and sold onto neighbours. Additionally, local representatives inform me that a Batwa community of five families were recently given 50 goats as part of an income generating programme; the entire herd was consumed over a two-day period by the group. Such is the performative defiance of this egalitarian hunter-gatherer community who appear resistant towards domesticity, making them the pariahs of contemporary post-war Rwanda.

The Batwa’s apparent recalcitrance towards their homes is beguiling yet overwhelming. This is something which became evident when I first asked them about their preference of dwelling, which is essentially a question of space (the forest or a house?). These new homes symbolise the Batwa’s subscription to Rwanda as a unified nation where ethnic distinctions are concealed. As an architect, I initially read the destruction of their new homes as a stylistic ‘fuck you’. But this acts goes beyond defiance and lies deeper at the roots of the effects of a forced transitioning from a mobile lifestyle to that of a fixed one: from forest to home, from grass to metal, from nomads to Joneses. Yet despite having homes like everyone else, no one wants the Batwa as neighbours.

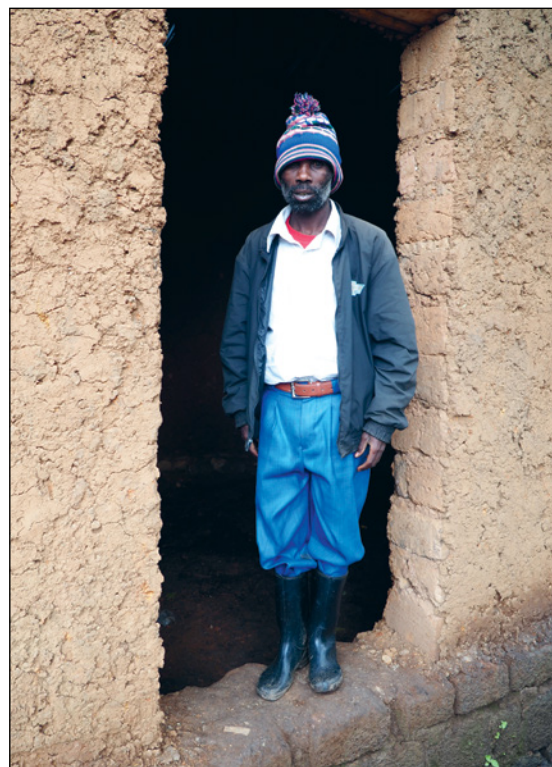
The Batwa are egalitarian by nature and have never owned land, a home nor remained in a fixed abode. There is no need for accumulation of material goods within primitive societies. As Pierre Clastre points out, “There is nothing in the economic working of a primitive



society, a society without a State, that enables a difference to be introduced, making some richer or poorer than others, because no one in such a society feels the quaint desire to do more, want more or appear to be more than his neighbour.” The Batwa’s destruction of the home is not just a defiant act; it satisfies their hand-to-mouth means of existence. Timber windows equals fire, and what is a window to begin with anyway?

To the Rwandan government, the forests represent an uninhabited space, safeguarding the treasured mountain gorilla that tourists pay \$750 a head to gawp at. To the Batwa, the forests are home and a source of physical and emotional wellbeing. The eyes of the Batwa see the world in a relational way: they use a relational language replete with metaphors and spiritual perceptions, while mapping space as one of events and activities. For example, a tree can signify many things to the them. It might be a source of food, or it may provide raw materials for medicinal plants or the weaving of rope; it can be a safe place for the stored hanging of goods, whilst simultaneously signifying the reincarnation of a deceased relative who is watching over them. To use the words of human geographer Sébastien Boillat who researches on indigenous knowledge, “The relational perspective means that the ecosystem encompasses humans; it is the presence of humans that makes the land complete.” The Batwa’s relational perspectives and today’s landlessness challenge our own assumptions about ownership within the consumptive heavy postmodern culture we reside in.

It is this relational way of seeing which translates to a mode of defying state capitalism in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. Hunter-gatherer Batwa communities there are protecting their rights to land within the forest, while defying local government and multinational bodies’ access to plundering natural resources. This is aided with the use of smart phones, mobile internet and cloud computing—technology that maps and tracks otherwise undocumented deforestation by logging companies in these remote locations. Whilst unable



“To the Batwa, the forests are homes and sources of physical and emotional wellbeing.”

to read or write, GPS-savvy Batwa communities use customised pictorial symbols based on their relational understanding of the forests as way to track such extractive transgressions. This information is mapped to advocate against environmental degradation and prevent encroachment upon ancestral lands. This process has been coined as ‘Extreme Citizen Science’ by Dr Jerome

Lewis—an anthropologist at UCL working with hunter-gatherer communities across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The architectural historian Joseph Rwykert, looked to the ‘primitive hut’ for the origins of early architectural principles—an understanding, which he and anthropologist Victor Buchli claim is a quest for a renewal of knowledge “in times of need.” Not to diminish or fetishise about the Batwa (whose social exclusion within Rwanda is dire), the defiance of such communities might be another form of renewal of knowledge against the tide of universalising generic shittiness that (Rwandan) modern culture has to offer. The Batwa are the ones that might well be abandoning homes, and architecture itself, but they are the ‘extreme citizens’ creating new pathways. And if they lead us back to the forest, so be it. ♡





# Resistant Architecture



Words by Gregorio Astengo

If the term 'defiance' generally evokes a creative tension, then Mario Botta embodies both the rebellious and unruly, as well as the more peaceful and romantic side of it. In our conversation, Botta unveils the many faces of his complex architectural philosophy.

**M**ario Botta speaks in a modest, but firm and resolute voice. Directing his practice from his hometown of Mendrisio, you can just picture him in the sunny Swiss landscape of the Ticino region, between lakes and mountains: the physical and emotional setting for most of his projects ever since he started building as a teenager. His practice—started right after graduating from Università Iuav di Venezia in 1969—has grown over the years in scale, reputation and geographic impact. Today, after more than 50 years of endless activity, Mario Botta (who recently turned 72) has one of the richest portfolios an architect could want: from his early family houses like the one in Stabio (1965), to great museums such the MOMA in San Francisco (1995); from the silent Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Switzerland (1996), to the monolithic Kyobo Tower in Seoul (2003) and the iconic Tschuggen Bergoase Wellness Centre in Arosa (2006).

Last year, Botta's Betchler Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina held a comprehensive exhibition of his works, including his artistic influences and encounters, appropriately called 'Architecture and Memory'. Indeed, Botta's projects speak of memory,

silence and history. They are courageous statements written in stone and brick, but also light, mass and gravity. These attitudes are rooted in his relationship with the Swiss land, with its natural environment and cultural tradition. But they also come from Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier, immortal champions of volume and light, who left an indelible sign on Botta ever since he collaborated with them in the late 60s. Listing all of his completed buildings turns out to be quite a challenge: I counted more than 150 between libraries, museums, theatres, houses, churches, offices—all built around the globe—not to mention exhibitions, renovations, temporary buildings... and an architecture school. The prestigious Accademia d'Architettura di Mendrisio, which will celebrate its 20th academic year in a few months, is mostly based on Botta's own academic design and very much reflects his unique visions on architectural education, practice and culture.



**Your projects often seem to express a strong sense of materiality, temporal permanence and presence of volume. Would you say this somehow stands**

**as a statement against or beyond current architectural rhetorics of lightness, immateriality and transparency? In this sense, how do you position yourself alongside your Swiss and Italian colleagues?**

In my practice I don't really relate with cultural fashions. I was trained through the culture of modernity and formed by its masters, and what I understood from them is that architecture is mostly gravity. It's a relationship with mother earth. Architecture only exists from the ground up and always projects its intentions, both physical and symbolic, back onto the soil. Many terms have been cultivated by fashion—think of Italo Calvino's 'invisibility'—pointing to some kind of ephemeral architectural character. While I generally understand their original intentions, other uses of these terms often seem paradoxical to me, precisely because architecture is always gravity. The architecture of our cities lives and has reason to exist because it is part of earth's crust. In this sense I think I might be an unfashionable architect. **Speaking of your design philosophy, how did it come into being within the architectural discourse and debate in Venice during the 60s and 70s? I'm thinking not only of your**



Museo Bechtler.

Photography: Enrico Cano.

masters Louis Kahn, Le Corbusier and Carlo Scarpa, but also of Aldo Rossi, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco dal Co.

All those great people you mentioned, while a little older than me, were all true travel companions, great friends as well as crucial intellectual references. With Aldo Rossi, for instance, I have always had a wonderful relationship. During the 60s and 70s he was teaching in Venice, but we often met in Ticino. Rossi's thought, especially his ideas around the architecture of the city, had for me a special interest. His philosophy, that somehow brought architecture back to city, was also very typical of the Venetian culture in a broader sense. I think of Tafuri but also of Giuseppe Samonà and Ignazio Gardella. We were realising at the time that architecture has the power and the strength to build and make the city. Architecture cannot be self-referential but needs to be born in a specific context. It consolidates as a stratification of the European city. Even more importantly, architecture

builds aggregation and integration, both physical and metaphorical, throughout the city. This attitude, which developed during the 60s and matured after 1968, brought architecture towards a field of action that didn't exist before. I belong to that generation and to that culture. I think that it remains a strong idea, born from an awareness that belongs to the specificity of the European city, and I think it is still crucial.

**How do you consider your training within this European context?**

I think that today we are, so to speak, orphans of the European masters of the city. We can only rely on our little strength while architecture goes towards a whole other direction. In this sense I feel kind of a loser. But maybe what we have is still enough to redeem architecture and to rediscover it as a form of resistance from superficiality and banalisation, from the loss of those values that today are still at the basis of urban life. I'm talking about historical stratification and the value of memory, that today are threatened by the confusion of great

repositories of data like the Internet. I believe in the return of architecture as a strong physical presence and as an act of resistance. We must recognise these values which are far from those offered by fashion and publicity.

**Louis Kahn, whom you often considered one of your most important influences, used to say, "A good building would produce a marvellous ruin." What sort of relationship do you look for your buildings to have with time? How does the notion of time come into your design process?**

A building's life is irremediably tied to its fragility in time. In this sense it inevitably reflects the condition of its social, economic and moral character. I think that temporal permanence is no longer considered a value. Up until a few decades ago we used to build pointing towards the centuries, if not towards eternity. Kahn insisted on the immortality of the millennial ruin. Instead, today we are aware of the fragility of materials—reinforced concrete for instance—in ways that would have been unthinkable

**"Architecture must speak in a current language, in conversation with the elements of the urban texture."**

before. Think for example of viaducts and motorways, which need constant maintenance in order to survive. Architectural history has revealed the true fragility of this model of durability and of modern culture as a whole, but I think the true purpose of the architect can go beyond matter and must also have strong symbolic connotations. When I go to a historic city like Venice, what I'm really looking for is myself. I look for a history that belongs to me through the memories of humanity. The strength of the city, in Europe more than anywhere else in the world, is enabling the historic centres to speak about love and death, about the fights and the encounters of the past. In my opinion, these are values that we cannot go along without—we never did. We need the city because it's a universal good that transcends time.

**Since the very beginning of your career, the problem of dwelling has been one of your main concerns. You've said, "If men truly lived as men, their houses would be temples." What are the main issues that now stand in the way of this happening?**

There is no doubt that dwelling is the architect's basic principle. Housing is still a crucial issue, the only one that is 'full-time', that always involves us and retains a primordial, maternal meaning. Home is where we go to look for ourselves as well as for our more intimate social condition. I have been designing houses in the past, but today they cost too much

and that's why we are forced to work elsewhere. I have designed mostly single-family houses and I have found that the optimal typological configuration always includes three basic components: a space of contact with the soil, a daytime space overlooking the horizon and a nighttime space open towards the sky. I have understood that such a place—which goes from the ground to the sky—constitutes a housing right, a human right. Heidegger used to say that man truly dwells when he can design his own space. I find this a beautiful definition because it highlights values that go beyond materials, function and economy. Architects should go back to working on those values and become the makers of this right to dwell.

**What should architects deal with primarily when designing houses?**

The relationship with the context is essential. A house is not an isolated fact outside of our world. The context, the landscape, the territory, the sky, are all part of the project, they are the project itself. The architect cannot build *in* a site, he has to build *the* site. A house has to be part of its geography and geology. If we fail to interrogate the context, we cannot even begin to design.

**Throughout your career, your work has received different labels such as regionalist, neo-rationalist,**

**post-modernist, functional-rational. You have often defended your work from these classes, rejecting the very idea of 'code'. How do you perceive these categories now? Has this distance evolved into a different awareness over the years?**

I think that when a pencil touches the paper, knowing that what comes out of it is neo-rationalist, regionalist or postmodernist doesn't really matter. These are categories that help us to understand what is happening in the world, but I leave them to critics and theorists. Those who make, like myself, work differently and those stylistic connotations don't really help me. I am more interested in the behaviour or the character of a spatial configuration in relationship with the land. I don't really care in which category this configuration falls in.

**Your architecture is often perceived as bold, daring statements that sometimes have been defined 'shocking', 'disturbing' and have also raised some level of discussion over years. I'm thinking for example of la Scala in Milan or the church of Santo Volto in Turin. What would you say is the impact that you want your buildings to have on the environment—be it the city or the landscape?**



Teatro alla Scala di Milano.

Photography: Pino Musi.





MOMA San Francisco.

Photography: Pino Musi.

What you say is true. But I perceive this critical attitude especially with my best works. In this sense I think of it as a success, because the first act of making architecture is placing a stone on the ground, transforming a condition of nature through a certain tension. I always work toward this end and I therefore look for confrontation, dialogue and also contrast. It seems to me that the geographical character of a land will gain value if it features a strong and readable element, like a bell tower. From this encounter of nature and man comes contrast, and rightfully so. Landscape needs contrast in order to become human. Even when we talk about urban and built environment, it is still important to highlight the context as well as the project within.

A project emerges because it has something to say to what surrounds it. In this sense the contrast that I look for points to a dialogue. My project for the Scala in Milan was just a partial restoration but raised a lot of discussion. I think that its success was the legitimacy of a contemporary language within the historical city. Instead of mimicking the old, which would have been welcomed without much polemics, a language that is correctly and humbly contemporary states that the historical stratification doesn't have to stop there. The same thing goes for the church of Santo Volto in Turin. An area once occupied by steel factories was transformed with a sign that speaks in a current language, in conversation with the elements of the urban texture.

**I find it very interesting that you use the word 'contrast' and 'resistance'. It seems to me that your architectural principles, methodology and practice have often somehow tried to escape mainstream ideologies, either in your designs, in your very role as an architect or in the discourses around the impact of your buildings. Could you tell us a bit more on your idea of resistance?**

I like the term 'resistance', and I often identify my architecture with it: resistance from banalisation, from superficiality and from disengagement. But I feel that architecture must also be a work of art. It moves and creates excitement as well as

tension and both these aspects work together against moral destruction.

**With this duality in mind, I'm thinking about a project like the MOMA in San Francisco. I feel like it was immediately welcomed and received positive criticism. How do you perceive it in this context of opposition and resistance?**

Yes, the project was quite an immediate success. I will also tell you that paradoxically that was pretty easy. San Francisco has grown as a forest of skyscrapers that completely deprived the city of its image. The architecture

**“Architecture is most defiant when the context in which it operates turns into disengagement and ethical mediocrity. In that case we must fight.”**

of San Francisco seems abstract and no one really knows what's inside those glass walls. Downtowns like these don't really speak. For the MOMA I used a rose window just like a cathedral—a laic cathedral—in order for it to become a beacon and an inspiration for the city. I think that architecture should rediscover the iconic charge that is part of its nature. This has characterised our discipline for centuries. I really don't understand why today we want to turn our backs on architecture as a reference point for the city.

**With this last consideration in mind, where do you consider your work defiant and where would you say it's normative?**

I think architecture needs to exist as both. It cannot always be the exception. It is most defiant when the context in which it operates turns into disengagement and ethical mediocrity. In that case we must fight. But inside a well-structured city, new blocks and urban tiles can fall more peacefully into place. I will also add that I consider ethical commitment and aesthetic responsibility as part of the same equation. I have always thought that a painting is beautiful if it is emotionally and aesthetically strong and not vice versa. Think of Picasso's *Guernica*. That painting moves and strikes us precisely because of the visual presence of death and destruction. The same thing goes for architecture. We have to recognise that a territory brings with it a history and a memory embedded and visible in its walls, roofs and trees. If this doesn't happen, our lands will turn into a single giant warehouse, marked only by disengagement. Interestingly, this is often what politicians hope for. We fill our earth with insignificance. And this is death, destruction and annihilation.

**You've previously stated, “Architecture is a profoundly local line of work and to be universal you need to be local.” With so much of your work currently expanding around the globe (East Asia, North and South America, Middle East), how does your European-ism allow you to be local? How does your global reputation allow you to still 'build the site' as you have stated before?**

I think today there is no doubt that the architect is a citizen of the world. Our relationships are more and more amplified by this condition. I have found that the strength of the drawing and the power of architectural design can overcome political, geographical, technical and cultural barriers. But you know, architects already did this in the past. For example the *comacine* Masters (stonemasons and builders that originated in Northern Italy) built all across Europe more than a thousand years ago, exporting their knowledge. Our condition as architects has always allowed us to move and travel. But in our current reality we must always have the ability to read the context, of not being self-referential, of understanding the questions that our



“We must always read the context, not be self-referential and understand the questions that our clients are less and less able to ask clearly.”

clients are less and less able to ask clearly. It is, of course, a problem of interpretation, but in this sense I don't think there is a contradiction between local and global.

**Let's take a step back and talk about your origins. What would you say drew you towards architecture in the first place?**

When I was 15 years old I dropped out of school because I felt that it wasn't for me. I was good but very impatient. I wanted to make and to work with images. I used to spend time with artists in their studios and I think at the time I could have been a painter or a photographer. Some favourable circumstances brought me in an architectural studio in Lugano, and there I was immediately struck. I was fascinated by the idea that a simple line on a piece of paper could turn into reality, into something concrete. I then started to study privately and I was able to access university in Venice. It was a path that started from artisanal practice and apprenticeship. It wasn't an intellectual choice but an emotional one, an intuition.

**Is there any truth to stories saying you designed your first building at the age of 16?**

It is true that during that first year of apprenticeship I designed a house for some friends and it got built. For me, it was an ideal exercise, a way of putting

into practice what I was learning, allowing the lines that I drew to become real. I still remember the feeling of when I saw the roof being laid upon that little building, with the sunlight entering from above for the last time. It's one of the greatest emotions I have ever felt in my life. It's a primordial feeling that gets to the very essence of architecture.

**Would you then suggest young students to practice before studying?**

Yes, work comes first. And this is what happens at the Accademia d'Architettura in Mendrisio, where students spend their second year practicing in a studio before coming back to finish their studies. I'm convinced that this brings them an immense advantage.

**Let's talk a bit more about the Accademia in Mendrisio. It is founded on the idea that architecture should have a humanistic basis. Does your programme try to resist current urges towards a technocratic architecture predicated on technical skills?**

I started designing the profile of the school in the early 1990s. This project was originally made for the Swiss polytechnics in Zurich and Lausanne, which at the time were overwhelmed by the number of new students. But they were also looking for a new assessment on architectural education. Both polytechnics had a very specific structure, developed at a time when the only answer to the pressure of the global was thought to be logic and mathematical; that seemed the only acceptable education for architects and engineers.

The paradigm I proposed for this new project was like a non-demonstrable equation. It stated that in order to face the complexities and changes of modern culture what was needed were the humanities. This completely reversed a tradition that had existed for many decades. But this change was also deeply rooted in the culture around Ticino, which was somehow far from the rationalist background of the Mediterranean. I myself have always drawn from humanist culture, for example from Carlo Scarpa. So at the centre of the school we put the design project, and around it we proposed disciplines such as philosophy, art history and architectural history. Even the more technical disciplines like structural science

or the study of materials are approached more for the ideas behind them than for the solutions they can generate. Architects need to learn how to communicate through those ideas. I say that only by understanding how a human being stands up can we understand how beams and pillars work. This particular formula has been successful. Courses have now grown in number but the matrix is still the same. We want a school where problems are more important than solutions. Solutions come with the profession and with life itself, but the school needs to raise questions.

**How would you then describe the profile of the architect that the school wants to produce?**

On the one hand it is very difficult to answer that question, because the outcomes are unlimited. But on the other hand it's also quite easy. Basically, we want a generalist architect. We have excluded specialisations, as long as we can count on postgraduate and advanced courses. We think that this kind of architect will be able to face the complexities of the modern world and therefore to move 'from the spoon to the city', to use an old saying. We want to know as much as possible in order to move through the complexities of the world around us.

**Going back to your projects, in your buildings one can often recognise a process of erosion and excavation of mass and form that closely recalls sculpture, such as the Casa Rotonda at Stabio or the house in Morbio Superiore, but also the Bechtler Museum or even your project for San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane in Lugano. Do you recognise this as part of your process? Do you consider yourself in some way a sculptor?**

There are sculptors who 'add', like Giacometti, and sculptors who 'remove', like Michelangelo or Henry Moore. I feel closer to the second category, but the reasons are merely architectural. I think that when we look at a landscape, architecture has to be easily recognisable. A primary form allows immediate recognition and an easy reading in relation to the geographic or orographic system. For example, a bell tower is only four metres wide—it's really quite small—

Photography: Alo Zanetta.



Casa Rotonda.

but has a gigantic force when seen in a natural context. The deep relationship between the primary geometry of these forms and those surrounding them is completed when we excavate and 'dig' these geometries, going inside the volumes. This specific attitude and process has helped me a lot, especially at the beginning of my career. This specific way of dealing with solids and voids was also an economic success—think of rearward windows, covered terraces, porticos, loggias and so on. This sculptural process has its origins both in the Kahnian paradigm of 'house within the house' and in the history of farm houses. Already in rural areas, houses were built by containing volumes instead of projecting them, for practical reasons. These intuitions are now part of my language but they originate specifically in the culture of where I was born and raised. I do nothing but dig... {we laugh}

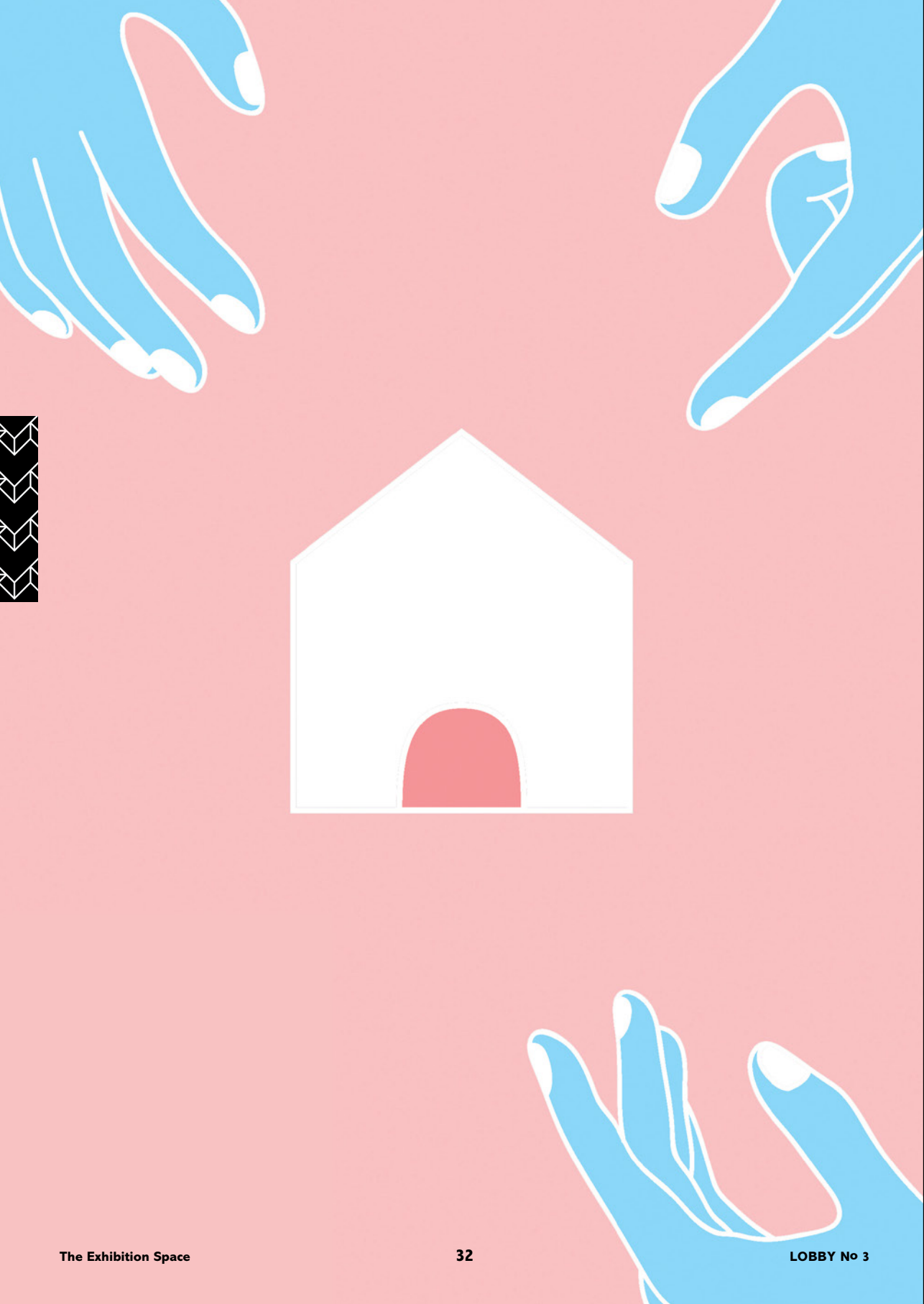
**You said, "There is no architecture without gravity", and you have insisted on the relationship between buildings and earth—between their materiality and the soil that they stand on. Which of your projects reflects this relationship more successfully than others?**

Well, for the architect, his project is always the next one. That's what gives us expectation and hope. I'm concerned with making and once something is made, it doesn't belong to the architect anymore, it becomes a collective good. But I can recognise that my most successful projects are the ones that were able to say something, where architecture didn't just stand and look but left a sign in the culture of its time. It might surprise you, but if I could, I would only build sacred spaces: churches, mosques, synagogues, temples; I feel nourished by ecclesial culture. Civil art and architecture has occupied

10% of my personal history, the rest was religious. What fascinates me is the possibility of silence and how we can still produce places for meditation. I think that in our secularised society sacred spaces are truly crucial and precious elements.

**Throughout your career you have dealt with a large variety of clients—private, public, religious, museums, banks, etc. How would you say the relationship between architects and clients has changed over the past 30 years? What are the problems with this relationship today?**

The good client is demanding, and in more prosaic terms, is also the one who pays. What I mean by this is that the good client recognises a role that is not his and that he needs. I don't trust those who say 'architect, you take care of it', because they don't know what they want. Clients think more and more often in terms of square metres, but this doesn't make the project. The client is the one that chooses the site, the programme, the economy. I never did a project without a client and I would never be able to take his place. I think it's important to recognise that just as the territory belongs to the project, so does the client. ♠



# Defiance and the Politics of Social Edification

VALUES AND STRATEGY

**Words by David Adjaye**  
**Illustration by Samra Avdagic**

Defiance is crucial to architecture, although I would reject the notion that it is or should be an intrinsic element to its practice. Rather, I believe it is best understood as a responsive tool, a way of channelling architecture's capacity to speak about the fundamentals of culture and citizenship into something that contributes to an agenda of social change.

Defiance, of course, is relative. It shifts across time, space and social location. A certain strain of defiant thought can gain momentum and become status quo. At the same time, that which appears defiant from one perspective is, from another, entirely complacent. Because defiance is conceptually dependant on that which it opposes, its referent can quite easily become overly elastic, so defiance as an ethos makes little sense to me. It can too easily devolve into a postmodernist

exercise in relativism, wherein any and all standards can and should be defied with equal vigour. Such thinking is predicated on the idea that the defiance in and of itself is interesting or valuable. It is this logic that has led to, among other things, architecture of spectacle: architecture that emerges from fantasy and which expresses a vision that is completely disengaged from context and user experience. These can and are excellent thought exercises, capable of opening up possibilities for architectural thought. But are such designs defiant in any meaningful way? Particularly when one considers who has the opportunity and means to explore these kinds of fantasies, it becomes clear that defiance for its own sake appears relevant only to a select few: a group that most would point to as quite traditional gatekeepers of knowledge and definitional privilege.

Given this, defiance in architecture can only accrue value when it attaches itself to some specific politic, which for me must be that of social edification. Our ideas about a civilised world are manifested

through the architecture we make, where ideas about access, personal freedom and social interaction are intrinsically embedded. The language of architecture has a massive capacity to draw focus on these concepts and to shift paradigms. With that comes, I believe, a responsibility to the politics of progression, liberation and emancipation. For me, it is only when defiance is linked to such a politic that it becomes relevant and interesting. It is only in theory that there is the luxury to identify the currents against one wishes to swim. Social movements and groups organised in resistance have a clarity and specificity in their mission that automatically gives context to their struggle; there is a clear set of values and a clear strategy.

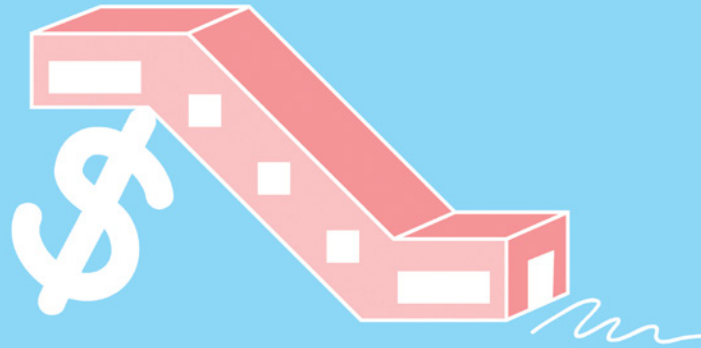
Architecture can and should participate in these acts of defiance, not only by recording and formalising them structurally, but also by moving those narratives forward and opening up new possibilities for those groups. In practice, this means innovating as a response, in a way that makes sense within context. Defiance in this instance becomes not



# Gentle Elusion



Photography by Arturo Soto



“The root of architectural defiance, grows directly out of addressing the needs of a community whose voice has been unheard or undervalued.”

an act of whimsy nor a starting point, but part of a larger agenda that can speak about inclusiveness, participation, access and liberty. It is about defying the logic that would suggest that the repetitive, impersonal structures that have been taken as de facto solutions for these communities are good enough, when we know from listening to them that they are not. It is about defying the logic that says crafting something unique must cost more. Here, the innovation, the root of architectural defiance, grows directly out of addressing the needs of a community whose voice has been unheard or undervalued. Then, architecture can stand in defiance of this hierarchy and reveal the necessity for concepts like community-building, and honouring the humanity of groups for whom previous architectural interventions had not prioritised.

It is from this starting point that faceless templates for project housing can be reconceptualised as a mixed-use space that includes comprehensive educational facilities, as well as arts programmes that address the real challenges facing

low-income groups who lack access to affordable housing. It is from this starting point that a Fordist factory can be reimagined as a community centre offering new opportunities for collaboration and engagement across religious, class and gender lines. It is from this starting point that a library becomes a tool for democratising knowledge by lowering access barriers through a careful consideration of the diversity of its users. Indeed, finding a way to work in diverse contexts and for diverse users in a manner that resists patronising and stereotypical narratives remains a critical endeavour in architecture. As globalisation opens new opportunities for architects but increasingly threatens cultural specificity, engaging people and place with genuine empathy remains the truest act of defiance. ♦















# Eavesdropping on the House of Architecture



EXCLUSION, DIALOGUE AND SECRECY

Words by Sophie Hamer

The Eavesdropper, Nicolaes Maes, 1657, Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum (on loan from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, RCE).

"Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains those limits just the same."  
Georges Bataille

Around the world, publics have been struggling to articulate their relationship to, and dreams for architectures. In most situations, professionals remain committed to the tight logic of professionalism and its ideals of specific, true and protected knowledge. The singular, correct interpretation of all aspects of architecture implied by this logic extends so far as to encompass experience: the domain of the users. As architects have invested time in building up the 'house of architecture', those commenting from outside have been labeled as ignorant, as mistaken—or worse, have been cast aside with laughter.

Over time, the stronghold of the house of architecture has been multiplied out, forming its own kind of suburbia. Eventually we arrived at the present day landscape: a sprawling horizon of discrete, private and often gated ideas situated within a vast, silent no man's land. Meanwhile, publics—shunned to the outside—have failed to respond in any meaningful manner. Rather than standing their ground and arguing their place, they have largely shrunk back into the shadows, allowing architectural production and discussion to continue without them. It takes a lot of energy to get to the suburbs—and amidst the sea of similarity, you have to know where you are going. On the edges, there are still some who have faith in open conversations. But for most, the conversations about the direction our architectural journey should take have been muffled by the thick walls built by those directing it.

The place these publics now occupy in relation to the house of architecture is clear: they are outside. What is not so obvious is what this position affords them. Implied by the very specific spatiality of the term 'outside', is a means of connection, an unbreakable link with the inside. Pressed against the external walls of the house, publics occupy the place around the house where the rainwater drips off the roof, the place where the eaves drop. They have become—whether through circumstance or through active defiance—eavesdroppers.

Taking on this very specific spatial role, the new eavesdroppers are located on the threshold that links and separates architects and publics. As their identity is defined by this relation of inside to outside, it is also shaped by the resulting conditions of exclusion, dialogue, secrecy and the play of illicit information. They listen in on the internal conversations of architecture, finding ways to mine meaning, even as the walls of the house are built thicker. They listen defiantly.

Nicolaes Maes's 1657 painting, *The Eavesdropper*, makes the rich spatiality of this act of transgression apparent. Situated outside the space of the painting, the viewer is let into the hushed secret. The framing devices of doorways and level-changes invite the viewers to occupy and then move beyond each space, all from the one position outside. While the eavesdropper cannot see the entirety of any one situation, they are invited to draw conclusions from what is implied in the frames. Working with materials provided by the framework of the architectural profession, eavesdroppers are also at liberty to put on different masks depending on how explicit the message is—or how aggressive they wish to be. They draw upon the imagination to anticipate design while at the same time developing a narrative that presents an alternative outcome. Taking place as an eavesdropper means that the narrative becomes theirs to develop and that they become owners of the space of others.

So with this knowledge, can we sketch an architectural politics of eavesdropping? Can we draw value from this act of defiance? Or might we go so far as to design for eavesdropping? Rather than a threat, we might be able to view eavesdropping as indicative of other everyday mechanisms that could be part of a new means of integrating publics and architectures. Eavesdropping itself might be understood as a technique, but it might also be understood as a way of determining what is valuable.

Architects and publics alike scramble between terms, practice and concepts, and in doing so, the architectures at the core of the discussion become forms of action. But of what, though? The eavesdropped buildings actively transgress the boundaries of the discipline, choosing eavesdropping as both its mode of motivation and of action. The productive job of eavesdropping is that—as a mode of both passive and active transgression—it pushes the limits of our experience of architecture. If architectural eavesdropping is a process of scattering thoughts and recollecting them in another place, then through eavesdropping, use becomes a transformative process. It allows the making of architecture to extend beyond the phase of physical construction. As users reconfigure architects' sentences into new forms, new meanings are defined from what has been built. By opening up the house of architecture to the incursions of eavesdroppers, we open up the making of architecture to other possibilities without destroying the house in doing so. ♦

# Blow Your Own Trumpet

FILLING GAPS AND CREATING SWELLS

Words by Julia Feix and Tarek Merlin (Feix & Merlin)  
Illustration by Samra Avdagic

We believe that as architects we should pop our heads above the parapets of our pre-defined roles and responsibilities. Even if saying it out loud feels somehow naive, as a practice we always seem to find our way back to the words we wrote in our original mission statement (all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed) almost a decade ago:

"What do we stand for? Well, there are a few things we won't stand for; we won't stand for the lazy, the obvious or the mundane. We stand for a sense of uniqueness. We stand for delight and enjoyment, truth and mystery, honesty and deception, texture, colour, light, humour, wit."

Alongside budget constraints, minimising risk, and maximising the value add, we have somehow managed to keep this idea sewn into the inner lining of our projects, looking to breaking down long-established boundaries and traditional ways of doing things. We've all been in *those* meetings—you know the ones: 20 white, middle-aged men in suits sitting around a giant conference table (that one with the hole in the middle, creating one big doughnut of conflict), all facing each other, slowly stinking out the room with their hot-air and stuffy-guff. We see

the ridiculousness in this but also have understood the opportunities that lie within. We've found that the way to play the game is not to seek to tear this system apart, but just to pull at it slightly; you must stand in the gap in the middle and gently create a swell.

We stand in this gap. For one thing we don't really look like that Ayn Rand illustration of the white, male architect, standing proudly in silhouette in front of a skyline, smoking a cigarette in his Mad Men suit. Being a practice with an equal opportunities LGBTQ ratio of 100% at director level, we are perhaps a little different than most, and we take pride in the idea that we might be a role model for others. There does seem to be a lack of visibility in terms of LGBTQ people in architecture and construction. It's only really when senior gay architects and directors start bringing their partners to office outings, client dinners and even contractors' Christmas parties, that there will be a greater acceptance—one created simply from the commonplace, everyday situation. It might be unusual for an architecture practice to be headed up by a gay woman and a gay man, but hopefully this will gradually change and people will see—that for us at least—it's not really this difference that makes us different.

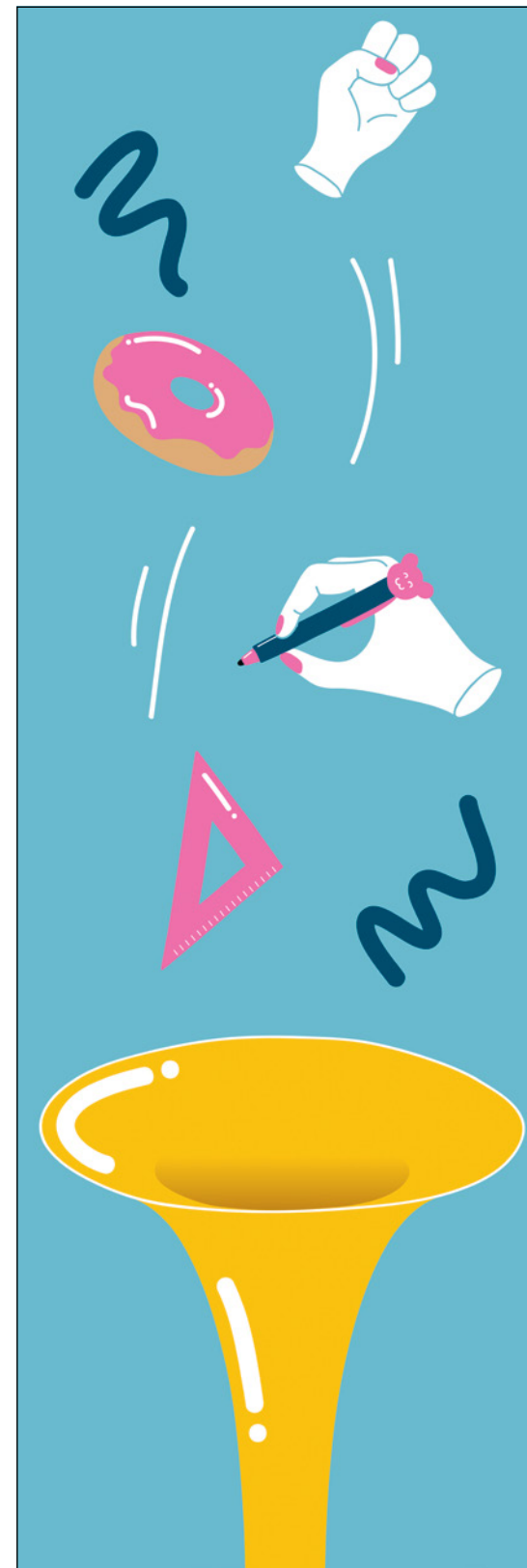
What makes us different is the way we approach our projects, simultaneously looking back as well as looking forwards. In every project, at every scale, we look for what's come before just as much as what's about to come. Clues from the site history or the client's personal story are carefully woven into

the project so that end result is somehow firmly embedded in the cultural and built environment of the site, while also proposing something that is new and invigorating—always distinctly contemporary but somehow distinctly familiar, in a search for new tradition.

We'd like to believe that the days of the star-architect sitting in his ivory tower, stroking a white cat, back turned to the camera, feeding his ego with every flick of his design-flair-filled pen, will soon come to an end. But the desire for this kind of brand architecture and what it can bring, in terms of a Bilbao effect, does still exist and even thrives around the world—particularly in new and emerging 'cultural' quarters in the middle and far east, for example. It's hard not to feel anything but an embarrassment, when images of the latest parametric snot-monster, plonking itself down on an unsuspecting desert somewhere, are plastered all over the pages of the latest glossy webzine. There's something painfully alien about this kind of approach to design in that it appears to have no bearing on the place, the local community or culture, but rather simply on the shape-making tools available to the designer at the time.

Some clients are thankfully taking a more enlightened view to procurement, seeking out different approaches to large building commissions. Finally, small practices are being included in larger competitions with clients explicitly encouraging collaborations between larger and smaller architecture practices, seeing the benefits of balancing seasoned experience with emerging talent. This can be a hugely powerful combination: the former bringing with it a wealth of wisdom and experience, the strength of resource and of course the all important PI cover. On the other hand, the latter brings a more youthful and playful approach, more in touch perhaps with emerging changes in the micro-cultures of the city, new technologies or materials, and the willingness to test new boundaries of what is possible.

The principle of a changing attitude to the traditional perception of the roles of the architect and the definition of practicing architecture is welcomed and well overdue. We urge the architecture discipline to become more open, more free; less naval-gazed and more horizon-broadened. Only then will we all—slowly but surely—start swelling out from behind conference tables, spreading ourselves tentatively outside the definitions of our own stereotypes, while blowing our trumpets as we go. ♦





# Consumerist Comrades

Photography by Thomas Adank  
Words by Regner Ramos

On the 70th anniversary of George Orwell's allegorical and dystopian novel, *Animal Farm*, we think back on the infamous uprising that took place at Mr. Jones's 'Manor Farm'. Intended as a critique of the social and political events that led up to the Russian Revolution, Orwell's book tells the story of a group of animals who—under the leadership of two young pigs, Snowball and Napoleon—revolt against their human owners and take over their farm. But the animals' creed, "All animals are created equal" and the Seven Commandments of Animalism they put in place for the wellbeing of each 'comrade', end up taking a turn for the worst. Power hungry and ridden by egos, the pigs—once the leaders of a just cause—oppress and exploit the rest of the animals as they brutally take control of the farm. That which was originally fuelled by a desire for justice, culminates in a tyranny led by pigs negotiating with the humans they rebelled against in the first place:

"Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which."

In this photographic essay, Thomas Adank picks up on this blurring of lines and gives us his interpretation. Impossible to distinguish between friend or foe, comrade or farmer, he questions whether the real pigs in capitalist society today are the greedy producers or the ravenous consumers. ♦

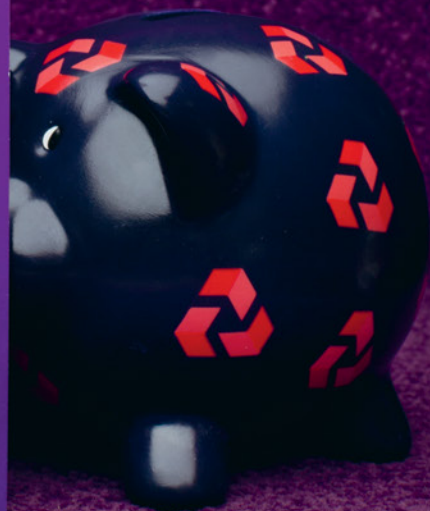
Chicken McHamlet



mortgages



mortgages



**“Man is  
the only  
creature  
that  
consumes  
without  
producing.”**



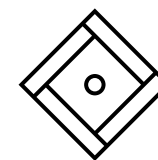




TV PAUL SMOKES CRACK PIPE



# Contained Elegance



Headstrong, independent and successful.  
Carme Pinós talks to LOBBY, not only about  
design methodologies and processes, but also  
about the challenges of shaping a professional path  
that defies the hegemony of the male  
in the discipline.

Words by Marcela Aragüez  
Portraits by Mikael Gregorsky







CaixaForum, Zaragoza.

Photography: Simon García.

Photography: Lourdes Grobet.



Tower Cube I, Guadalajara.

Despite a natural charm and an exquisite taste for fashion, Spanish architect Carme Pinós does not like to be in front of a camera. During one of the warmest afternoons in London this year, we photograph a reluctant Pinós on the streets of Bloomsbury, just prior to our conversation with her at her hotel nearby. “How many pictures do you need?!” she exclaims, eager for the shoot to come to an end.

Certainly, one does not need to be quick-witted to grasp that Carme is an energetic, strong and an honest woman—qualities that moreover seem to match with the architecture she has produced through her practice—Estudio Carme Pinós—for more than 20 years. When looking at some of her last built

projects, like the Tower Cube I in Guadalajara (Mexico) and the CaixaForum in Zaragoza (Spain), it is easy to realise how their monumentality is not achieved with today’s common mechanisms of special effects and extravagant shapes, but with a clear and robust structural concept and a sensible use of noble materials.

Pinós was first known as the professional and personal partner of the prematurely departed Enric Miralles. But the success she obtained alongside such a unique figure soon appeared to work against her independent career. After Miralles/Pinós dissolved, few people were interested in what Pinós had to say about contemporary architecture—this adding on to the difficulties of being a woman architect in the early 90s.

However, focusing on the production of a contained but firm architecture with a strong sense of social responsibility, Pinós can be considered today as one of the few living female architects with international reputation.

With a tight group of just over 15 employees—which Pinós refers to as her ‘family’—her work process begins in the form of ideas born from her sketches. Computers are not allowed to be used until the design is ready, showing that to some extent she seems to play with old-school rules of the architectural profession. In fact, several times during our conversation Pinós alludes to Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s 17th Century literary character Don Quixote of La Mancha—a man, who after obsessing over chivalric tales, loses his sanity and fails to see the world as is, but rather as a completely reconstructed, imagined knightly story. Being slightly lonely and absorbed by their profession, this type of ‘Quixote architect’ fights alone (or rather alongside his sole sidekick Sancho Panza) to overcome the numerous adversities that the construction of a building entails, emulating to some extent Don Quixote’s infamous battle against the windmills he hallucinates as monstrous giants. Although Pinós has won her fair share of battles, she recognises the necessity of being part of a team in today’s globalised professional environment. This afternoon, sitting in an empty hotel restaurant, Carme describes with sincerity her commitment to the profession, highlighting the advantages and hardships of being an independent architect in the 21st Century.



**You started your professional life working very intensively on competitions together with Enric Miralles. Do you think that this independent and self-sufficient way of starting an architectural career after finishing the studies is still feasible today, given the increased number of graduate students?**

Every country has a different way to make architecture. In Spain, for instance, there are still small offices where a lonely architect even calculates the structural



system. They are a sort of ‘Don Quixote’ architect, dealing with everything—with too much responsibility—but also with much more control of what they do. Being independent is almost a utopia nowadays. Architecture has become much more complicated, and clients ask for credentials; in order to produce a big project, you need to be part of an acknowledged team.

**You’ve previously mentioned that the Civic Centre in Hostalets (1992) is one of the most important projects of your first stage with Miralles. You highlight the clarity in its structural idea, as is also the case of Torre Cube I in Guadalajara (2005). Can we infer through this that there is a sort of continuity in your design philosophy?**

Absolutely. I never broke with anything related with my past. The Miralles/Pinós way of thinking can be easily found today in Estudio Carme Pinós. I still keep the same concerns and curiosities. However, I do not have Enric’s drawing skills and insatiable capacity of wonder, and I guess that is why I am more contained and rigorous in my practice. That is why I like Hostalets among other projects at that time. It has a very clear structural idea. **Since 1991, you lead your own architectural office. How has being a woman architect—not very usual at that time—influenced your professional career?**

It was hard back then, but the experience made me very strong. I had to make a great effort to believe in myself. After the partnership with Enric ended, nobody really cared about my future as an independent architect. At that time, there were not many couples of architects like us. Enric was a very charismatic person, so when we broke up, all the interest from the architectural community focused on him. I guess I was also very young, and the reaction towards my figure was in part my fault, as I preferred staying in the background when we worked together. But the important thing here is that, after all these difficulties, I believed in me, and I also had people by my side who kept reminding my values and strengths during the weak moments. It cost me many years to build my own practice, but I am very proud of what I have achieved. I feel

proud of everything I have ever made, and I am not like other architects who have a sort of ‘B-series’ work besides their mainstream production.

**When it comes to constructing a building, the process is still today dominated by masculinity. Did you have to defy settled social models to be respected as a woman in this context?**

Nowadays you can find more women in this sector, although not site managers. They are still mostly men, but the situation is changing quickly. Past social systems in the building site are evolving to more inclusive communities, but it is a slow process. In this sense, I have to recognise that I am still a ‘Quixote

“Amidst the instability the Spanish economy, I have never fired anybody. I keep my family tight.”

Architect’, but I have just recently set a partnership with a big company to take part on a stadium competition for the first time in my career. In any case, I am still the one who makes decisions and has the last word.

**You mention that you preferred to be in the background to Miralles. Networking, nowadays, seems to be as important as design skills. To what extent is the work of an architect valuable if there is an absence of a consolidated network of relations and influences?**

Decades ago, it was quite different in this respect. Being an architect was a very exclusive and elitist profession. You had to belong to a good family in order to become an architect—in Spain at least. The fact that now the architectural profession is much more extended and also more

internationalised requires movement, travelling and setting connections. In this sense, it is important to work with people you can rely on. This image of an architect exclusively committed to drawing at their desk with glasses perched on their head is no longer possible. For instance, one can be working with a team of architects in Japan, and to do that, you need to have a reliable partner as a representative of your office abroad. But the profession has become more complicated in terms of being developed in a globalised system. Also, legal responsibilities have increased in the past years, and architects have to control every single detail of what it is built to avoid future surprises.

**I have heard that you try to keep a relatively small team, with no more than 15 people, with whom you hold a very personal relationship. Is this a premeditated decision translated in a collaborative practice that tries to avoid the dynamic of a merely productive enterprise?**

My work group is very important to me. They are like a family. There are people who have worked with me for about 20 years, and they understand me very well—I rely on them completely, and I am nothing without them. The decision not to expand my team is indeed a conscious one. On a particular occasion, I had a lot of work, and I decided to partner up with an engineering company who would take care of the construction plans under our supervision, rather than hiring more collaborators in my team. This way I could keep the same group.

The working life of an architect is very unstable. So what do you do with the people you hire in a particular moment because you have a significant amount of work but eventually end up not having enough to keep them busy? Do you just kick them out? With the instability of the economic system in Spain, many of my colleagues had to fire half of their team. I have never fired anybody. I keep my family tight.

This familiar connection is also translated in the design methodology. There are two groups in the family regarding their age and experience. We differentiate between what we call the ‘barons’ and the ‘scullions’, but the system is not really a hierarchical one.







Gardunya Plaza, Barcelona.

Photography: Josep Losada.

“I could play the role of transgressor, but this place does not really need that. Besides, who am I to change people’s lives?”

They interchange their roles quite often. Certain people are good at working on specific things, and as I know them all very well, it is easy for me to decide who is going to fit better in a particular project. The first sketches and thoughts are always mine, so once I have drafted an idea, I choose somebody to make the

project with me and we start a dialogue. We always study the surrounding area and the program very well, and we start developing the project from my first lines and conceptual models. At this initial stage we always work by hand. I do not allow anybody in the office to take the computer until the design idea is clear. **But it seems impossible today to ask students to draw without computers...**

I am not against the computer, but when you have to rethink something, then you must go back to the pencil anyway. Hands work in direct relation with your mind—intuitively. Intuition means being able to work with what you have in your ‘hard drive’. The machine is a device that helps communicate ideas, but you do not have to be seduced by it. People tend to think that being a good architect means being skilful with a computer software. This does not make you a good designer. You have to first reflect on the ideas you have in mind and deeply understand the problems you have to solve with your project.

**You spent many days observing the activities of people who visit and live around Plaza Gardunya in**

**Barcelona, where you are currently working on a complete redevelopment. What can architects learn from people’s everyday movements and urban routines?**

You learn everything. We must never forget that architects work for people. Plaza Gardunya is located in the very heart of Barcelona. It is part of a consolidated urban network. People have been living there for generations, and I must learn from the years-long practices they have developed in the area. I could play the role of transgressor and transform the neighbourhood into something else, but this place does not really need that. Besides, who am I to change people’s lives? I hear them, I observe them and I study their routines. If I respect these dynamics it is because I find them healthy and good. I would try to change them otherwise, but people are proud to belong to this neighbourhood.

Among the buildings I had to design for Plaza Gardunya, there is the new Escuela Masana—an art school which is now located in an old former hospital. I talked with students and teachers to get to know their needs, and I tried to

translate them in a contemporary, formal language. It had to be a very representative building, very sculptural, as it is an important institution in Barcelona. The school needed to have an imposing façade, while keeping the building functional. The existing building has a very big cloister, but this is not possible to reproduce in the new location, so I decided to perform a set of spatial rotations in the new building to create courtyards for the students and staff to have open spaces inside.

**You have referred to one of your latest built projects, the CaixaForum in Zaragoza, as being a ‘perfect machine’, where every space is properly committed to its function. This fact alludes to the architect’s responsibility of generating functional buildings, but also to the balance that must be found between functional control and the degree of freedom that must be given to the user to generate their own practices. How do you find this balance?**

I wanted CaixaForum to be a perfect machine. The program is very complex but the space is simple, and it works. I worked hard to depurate the spatial scheme so as to get to a very simple solution that could solve all the programmatic complexities. I have a theory that when a building can be explained in a very easy way, it reaches a very powerful image. It is like a tree. You understand it at once, you know how it works and it has a very strong presence.

A balance between controlling and letting go is crucial in architecture. I always say that one of the greatest disadvantages of many contemporary buildings is that they are designed as if they were just machines to fulfil only one specific purpose. With CaixaForum, the program helps in this sense because it is a cultural centre and rooms need to be flexible. However, they must function very accurately, otherwise spaces would be refurbished in the worst possible manners. There is a tendency to look for pragmatism and not for generous spaces, and if you want to keep the generous spaces alive, they must work perfectly. I achieved that in CaixaForum after talking with members of staff and thoroughly studying

the other two branches built in Madrid and Barcelona. I understood how they worked and which problems they had. Good architecture must be generous, and it must be generous with the people that will use the space. Even in very constrained programs like in hospitals, this generosity should be achieved.

**In 2012 you started a furniture design company called ‘Objects’. When looking at the products you commercialise, one is transported in time to the beginning of the 20th Century, where architects like the Eames were also industrial designers. How did the idea come up?**

It came up because I am constantly creating furniture for my house. I never had a lot of money. Now I have a very big and privileged house, with many books, but also with a lot of empty space, and I always have the need to fill it somehow. I constantly entertain myself sketching

and thinking about these designs. As I spend a lot of time alone, I used the time for this new enterprise. It also came in a time in which we did not have a big amount of work at the office.

**You even have a showroom for Objects in Barcelona. How does this design process—which is more commercial-oriented and mass-produced—differ with the rather customised and individualised processes in architecture?**

I have to say that I have many more designs—both in my mind and produced in prototypes—than those that are being commercialised and exhibited in the showroom. I have beds, tables and shelves, always generated with the same elements: blended metal plates without screws. But the thing is that this story is growing very fast. It all started as a casual thing, but it is becoming much more serious, I am a business owner now, but I don’t really have time for that!

Photography: Estudio Carme Pinós.



Objects, LIZA.



Regarding the process of producing these pieces of furniture, it is different than working on an architectural design, but if you have a look at the furniture they are all basically reduced to structure. Simplicity and depuration comes again into play. The pieces need to be very easy to assemble—very simple, pragmatic and always with the same methodology. It is like a game. The designs are not finished, and users can assemble the pieces as they wish, playing with them.

Apart from the designs for Objects, I have also recently designed a floor tile. Since my profession is about building things, I created a tile that can be combined in multiple ways to create different patterns. I did not want to make just a drawing. This is not my style. In the end you have to take the risk and do what you really want to do. I like playing, and I transform everything into a game. **Lastly, coming back to the topic of ‘Defiance’, you argue that it is very important for an architect to know what they do not want to do when starting a project. Can this ‘no’ be understood as a negation to the conventional, to the established and to what it is expected from the architect?**



Objects, SIRAP.

It is not about not being conventional. If you are authentic, you cannot be conventional, because the conventional is coming from something apprehended; this will not happen when ideas are born from yourself. Negating things at the beginning of a project is not for the sake of being different, but it is very important to know what we do not want to achieve. You do not need to know where the path is leading to, and how long it will take to get to a design solution. However, if the design solution comes very quickly,

it is probably something conventional, something that has been done before. The first thing you need to know, in order to start to find out where the design will take you, is clarity about what you do not want. The reading of texts that do not specifically relate to architecture has been a great help for me in this respect. I just reread Richard Sennet’s *Flesh and Stone* and it really makes you think differently. It is revealing. These texts teach you how to think, how to reflect and understand the meaning of what you see. ♦

Photography: Estudio Carme Pinos.



Objects, MONI.

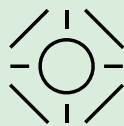


Mallorca Tile.

Photography: Biel Huguet.



# The Chaos of Neglect



RIOTING AND ARCHITECTURE IN BALTIMORE

Words by Amanda Palasik  
Photography by Kevin Creaney

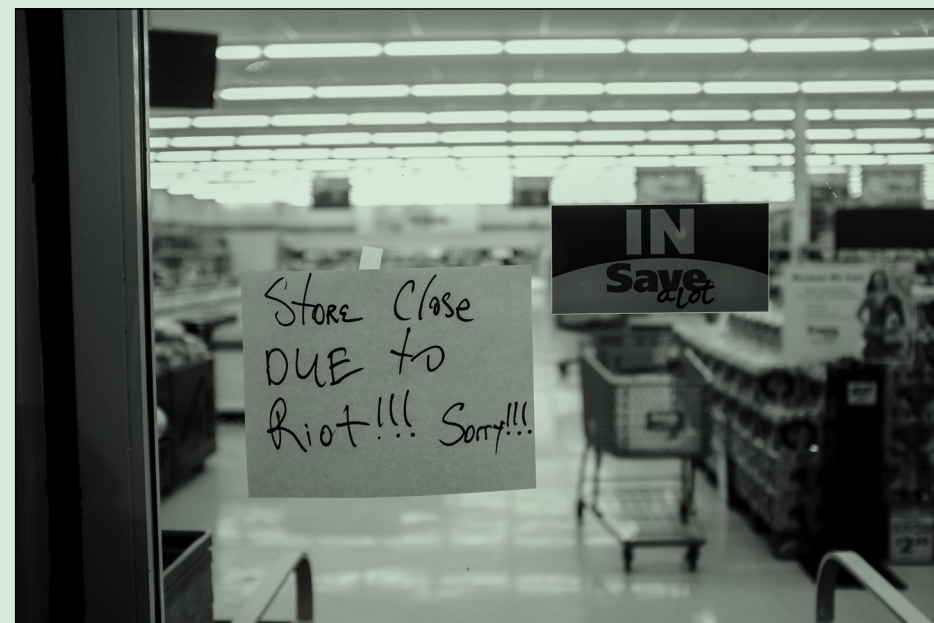
The streets of Baltimore, Maryland shimmer with broken glass, while buildings are ablaze and blood stains mark the pavement. On 6 April 1968, a peaceful protest against the murder of black civil rights activist Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., turns violent. The nation watches in a state of dismay as media headlines portray the city as a war zone, leaving six dead and causing \$12 million in property damage. Baltimore's response? The city must protect itself from its citizens. Out of the crisis, the phoenix never rose, but rather turned its back on the city and returned to the cage: eliminate public space to deter collective organising of the masses; eliminate ground floor windows; rezone privileged neighbourhoods to keep out 'strangers'; transform the city into a fort. We don't want chaos, "not in our backyard!"

28 April 2015, déjà vu. Sitting on the upper tier of the 18 bus, I look to the man beside me reading a newspaper article with the headline "A War Zone in Baltimore". Once again, Baltimore becomes the focus of international limelight. Thousands gather in the streets of the city demanding justice for Freddie Gray, a 25 year old black man who fatally fell victim to alleged police brutality. Another peaceful protest turns violent, resulting in \$9 million in damage to local homes, businesses and automobiles. Notice a trend? Enraged citizens turn to social

media to organise, outsmarting the city's formally prescribed antisocial antics that prove our built response once again flawed.

These reoccurring protests are more than an uprising against racial injustice and social discrimination. They are consequences—culminations of defiance against decades of neglect that plague the segregated communities of Baltimore. Industrial decline hit Baltimore hard in the 1950s. The shrinking city syndrome set in, and the economically privileged got in their cars and fled to the suburbs where alternative economic opportunities and white picket fences welcomed them with open arms. This 'white flight' left Baltimore's primarily black population to fend for itself. No resources, no jobs, no tax base and often no homes, despite immeasurable vacancies. Why are we perplexed by the concoction of destruction, looting and rage that occur in these pinnacle events? By now, we *should* know why caged birds sing.

The act of rioting can perhaps best be described as the epitome of defiance: a by-product of crisis. But as in Baltimore's case, defiance does not always imply an end to the cycle of calamity. Who is to blame for this crisis? Architects, as urbanist and purveyors of the built environment, are as guilty as the authorities who have failed to address the lingering social and economic repercussions in these blighted communities. As Rem Koolhaas suggests in "Whatever Happened to Urbanism?", "chaos is what happens when nothing happens." Baltimore has fallen victim to the architect's silence, lack of attention and deficiency in innovation. Our profession's



Baltimore, 2015.

"hypocritical relationship with power"—as Koolhaas calls it—assumes a responsibility for this self-inflicted chaos. We have defined the streets as a stage for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of speech, yet that very artefact is the physical manifestation of an imposed order on society. It is not coincidental that the built environment often becomes a target of strife and why rioters torch their own neighbourhoods, pharmacies and the foundations of new investment. It never belonged to them—the citizens for whom we designed *for*. We, as architects, have failed Baltimore, failed to listen and respond to its demands. We have a professional responsibility to balance the fickle nature of the built environment to perform as both protagonist and antagonist in the context of these deeper social, economic and political issues.

In 1989, Baltimore invested \$131 million in a major urban renewal effort in one of the most economically and socially distraught regions affected by post-industrial decline. Blocks of new housing were renovated and constructed amidst neighbouring vacancies, imposing suburban white picket fences and vinyl cladding to create mutant versions of the city's ubiquitous row housing. No surprise, these efforts failed to realise revitalisation ambitions as poverty, unemployment, crime and vacancy levels have continually risen. Instead, it imposed an 'idealistic' aesthetic as remedy to coax the underlying issues.

And yet, architects continue the laissez-faire attitude towards these issues, resulting back to typological standards with the delusion that they efficiently accommodate the demands of modern day society. Take for instance Baltimore's omnipresent row house fabric. What was initially designed as a one-size-fits-all mass housing 'solution' for Baltimore's 19th Century industrial labour force is still regarded as the status quo for new urban housing. A surface reading of the issue of the row home typology will illustrate its lack of flexibility: those financially privileged are afforded the luxury of renovation, of adapting physical confines to accommodate one's needs, while others are forced to adapt their lifestyle—their family dynamic—to the built constraints as dictated through architecture. For whom are we designing?

To be innovative, our profession must not fall back on accustomed solutions, nor must we conform to the authorities that stifle our own creativity. In the case of Baltimore, there is an urgency for innovation, to eliminate segregation through physical integration and to design the city for all citizens. Until our profession becomes defiant against our own battles with innovation, we are powerless in breaking the cycle of a self-induced chaos. ♦



# Beyond Control

A CASE OF JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Words and Photography  
by Miranda Critchley

66 Weeds, as a class, have much in common with criminals,” wrote the editors of Sir Edward Salisbury’s *Weeds and Aliens* in 1964. They can be bad but they can also be good; “an aggressive weed in one environment may be a charming wildflower in another.” And what is a weed? “A plant growing where we do not want it,” concluded Salisbury.

*Fallopia japonica*—Japanese Knotweed—is a big-time criminal in the weed world. A new plant can grow from a root fragment weighing less than a gram, and it grows quickly—in four weeks it can reach five feet. Its creeping roots—rhizomes—grow deep into the ground, and above the surface, its stems can push through asphalt or lift concrete slabs into the air. Needless to say, to get rid of it is expensive—the United Kingdom spends over £150 million a year on Japanese Knotweed eradication, and it is even factored into costs of development schemes.

Philipp von Seibold, a German doctor and botanist, first brought Japanese Knotweed to Europe from Japan in the 1840s; although the London Horticultural Society had introduced a Chinese Specimen to England in 1825, they’d planted it in an artificial swamp in Chiswick, where it failed to thrive.

Siebold sold *F. japonica* as an ornamental plant but listed its uses too: the stabilisation of sand dunes, flowers for bouquets, forage for cattle and dead stems that could be used to make matches. In his sale catalogue, Siebold was keen to advertise that Japanese Knotweed was a prize plant: it had been awarded the gold medal by the Society of Agriculture and Horticulture at Utrecht for most interesting new ornamental plant of the year. Another description came almost as an afterthought: “inextirpable.”

“From prize winner to pariah,” as botanists John Bailey and Ann Condly put it. Gardeners William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll were initially enthusiastic, but Robinson was quick to acknowledge that Japanese Knotweed was ‘weedy’ and sprung up everywhere in light soil. By his death in 1866, Siebold had cultivated almost a thousand species or varieties of trees and shrubs in his acclimatisation garden in Leiden; 20 years later, when British horticulturalists F. W. Burbidge and Peter Barr visited, the place was a jungle of Japanese Knotweed.

Weeds defy human attempts to cultivate and control; at times we prefer a wilderness. The epigraph to William Robinson’s *The Wild Garden* (1870) is a quote from Sydney Smith: oppressed by the regularity of the gardens of an English country house, he used to “escape from the made grounds, and walk upon an adjacent goose-common, where the cart-ruts, gravel-pits, bumps,



Weeds growing on the pavement.





“One woman he interviews has a dog with an allergy to lawn chemicals; she puts boots on its bleeding paws and continues chemically treating her patch of green.”

irregularities, coarse ungentlemanlike grass, and all the varieties produced by neglect, were a thousand times more gratifying than the monotony of beauties the result of design, and crowded into narrow confines.”

But creeping roots can be distressing. “I believe I was not an evil man until the balance of my mind was disturbed by the fact there is a patch of Japanese Knotweed which had been growing over our boundary fence on the Rowley Regis Golf Course,” wrote Mr. McRae from the West Midlands before killing his wife and then himself. Getting rid of weeds can become an obsession. In *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*, Paul Robbins looks at America’s relationship with its lawns. One woman he interviews has a dog with an allergy to lawn chemicals; she puts boots on its bleeding paws and continues chemically treating her patch of green.

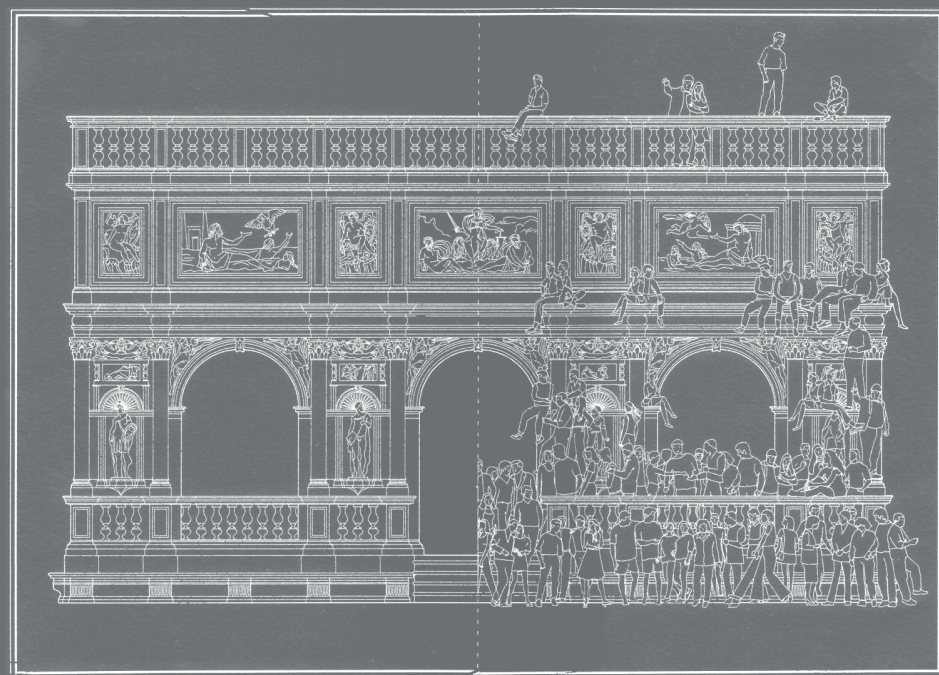
It’s hard work for humans to defeat weeds. Insects can do a lot better, and

schemes are in development to use jumping plant lice (psyllids) to control Japanese Knotweed. High psyllid populations can kill small plants; larger plants develop stunted and deformed leaves. But this is a long-term approach and achieving any results will take years. If only gardeners had heeded a warning in the *Cornishman* in 1892. “There is a caution about Japanese Knotweed,” read the notice. “It has a tendency to get beyond control.”♦

# The Seminar Room



# When Pink Floyd Came to Venice



In 1989, on the night of the festival of the *Redentore*, five prog-rock heroes performed in Venice.

Giorgio De Vecchi, Francesca Romana Dell'Aglio, Anna Livia Friel, Benjamin Gallegos, Marco Provinciali, Sansovino's Loggetta during the Pink Floyd concert in 1989, from ISOLARIO, Printed at belafonte, Venice.

## Another Brick in the Wall

Words by James Taylor-Foster

Pink Floyd, two students of architecture turned prog-rock heroes, wanted their pan-European 1989 *Delicate Sound of Thunder* tour to be truly out of this world. They tasked their agents with the organisation of a series of unique shows, performed in places of historical and architectural significance. For their show in Venice on the July 15th, thousands of people were expected to stream into *San Marco* to be a part of what many saw to be a 'once-in-a-lifetime experience.' The event was also set to be broadcast live in over twenty countries worldwide.

An enormous barge stage and light-weight tubular scaffold was assembled at *Santa Marta* before being floated into St. Mark's Basin, at the mouth of the Grand Canal. The floating stage was draped in sheets of canvas and a second barge was adapted to host the technical apparatus required to realise the complex theatrical performance that was planned. As the start of the show drew nearer, a patchwork quilt of small boats mushroomed around the stage as vessels huddled bow to stern to be as close to the stage as possible.

The show, which had been authorised to last no more than ninety minutes, would be free of charge. It would end climactically with the annual fireworks of the *Redentore*—one of the most significant and historically-charged religious festivals on the Venetian calendar. Venice's governing body hoped that this tidy, festive interaction between century-old tradition and the 'alien' would appease resident critics.

Three days prior to the *Redentore* the city of Venice's Superintendent for Cultural Heritage, Margherita Asso, forbade the performance. He argued that the risk to the historic fabric of the city—the Basilica of San Marco in particular—was simply too great.

Yet, three hours before the concert began, a compromise was reached: if the decibel-limit were to be lowered to prevent damage to the Basilica's ancient mosaics, and the floating stage were to be sailed 30 metres further into the basin, the permits would be re-issued.

The organisers capitulated and the show went off without a hitch. It was said to be one of the most spectacular ninety minutes of music, scenography and celebration that fans had ever experienced. Around 200,000 people poured into *la Serenissima*, clambering onto monuments to secure a view over the lagoon. As dusk sunk into night and the show came to a close many fans slept in the *piazza*, nestling in thresholds and loggia. Yet with so many wedged into *Piazza San Marco* and its adjacent *piazzetta*, the aftermath was the scene of enormous, unforeseen tension.

Many Venetians saw the event as "something akin to a barbarian invasion of [their] public space,"<sup>1</sup> making a mockery of the tradition of the *Redentore* and the city's most treasured public space. These sentiments extended into the architectural sphere, too. In 1993, not long before his death, Manfredo Tafuri spoke of how "he despised the concert for being nothing more than a *post-modern masquerade*."<sup>2</sup>

Venetians had some cause for resentment. That week, newspapers reported that three hundred tons of litter was left abandoned scattered across the city, forcing the Italian military to be deployed in order to clear it away. It became apparent those in attendance had also physically defaced a number of structures around *San Marco*, while 'Europe's drawing room'—the *piazza* itself—had been treated as an enormous latrine.

Lamp-posts had been damaged as people had climbed up and hung from them for a better view. More worryingly,

the intense vibration of the sound, coupled with the thousands of people who had swarmed through the streets, had caused damage to a number of nearby structures—the Basilica included. Local shop owners constructed makeshift barricades for fear of looting, and thefts and incidents of violence against Venetians were reported throughout the city. Anecdotal accounts recollect people injecting heroin in *Piazza San Marco*.

In the days following, Venetian residents staged a seven hour sit-in protest at the City Hall forcing Mayor Casellati and his entire council to resign. Plans for Venice to host the 2000 World Expo, which were under consideration at the time, were quickly withdrawn when it became clear that the city and its people simply could not, and *should* not, cope with surges of people.

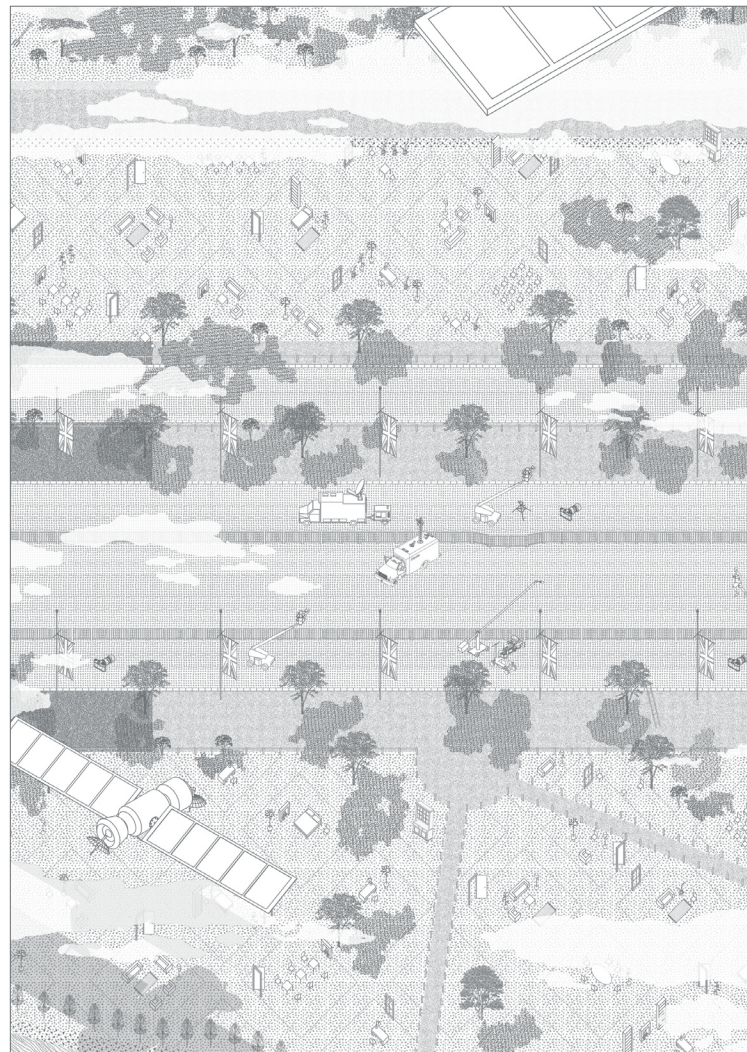
Pink Floyd's Venetian concert of 1989 is representative, first and foremost, of the wholly transformative power of festive events in the city. Latent within the spectacle and political setting of events of this type is the potential for the architectural and collective urban fabric to be unpicked, restitched and, in some cases, intangibly reordered with lasting effect. From Venice to Belgrade, Mumbai to Tokyo, and Montréal to Versailles, we'll investigate the city's capacity to act as a ready-made, historically-layered stage and set for festive events of all scales to form and take hold. ♦

<sup>1</sup> Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Pink Floyd and the Imago Urbis*. AA Files 69.

<sup>2</sup> Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Pink Floyd and the Imago Urbis*. AA Files 69. Originally sourced in *Le forme del tempo: Venezia e la modernità*, Università iuav di Venezia: 1991–2006 (Venice: Grafiche Veneziane, 2006).



# Seven Studies Across Seven Cities



Hikaru Nissanke and Jon Lopez, *Reception Rooms*.

Francesca Romana dell'Aglia, Uroš Pajović, Rohan Varma, Darren Deane, Mark Pimlott, Brendan Cormier, Hikaru Nissanke and Jon Lopez examine the nature of the urban festival over four continents

## The Dignity of Gestures



Words by Francesca Romana dell'Aglia

**Prologue** On 6 June 2015 the *Biennale Danza*, titled 'The Dignity of Gestures', opened in Venice. Virgilio Sieni's direction presented a piece that involved over a hundred dancers, drawing in a passing audience and enacting the urban fabric of the ancient streets and *piazza* of the city. This *mise-en-scène* reaffirmed the original theatrical nature of the city's public space: one where an historical stratification of individual histories and styles are overlaid to build a unique assemblage. This production defined dance as a political body with the city as its scenography.

**Act I—Campo S. Agnese** We gather in the open space, set between Accademia Bridge and the Giudecca Canal. With neither sound nor introduction, bodies create an unfolding scene which thematically centres on the concept of time and duration. Bodies engage in four sequential movements, each related to a precise experimentation which explore the transition from one position to another: from lying to standing, running to crawling, kneeling to jumping. An audience gathers around this uncommon sight and, as they do, they construct a stage as the dancers develop their choreographic research. As bodies measure time, architecture is just a witness.

**Act II—Campo S. Trovaso** From within the crowd dancers emerge, drawn towards the scene. The centre of the *campo* is a natural stage, slightly elevated over the *fondamenta*. As they converge, a dance of discovery begins. Timid encounters are followed by rapid escapes, culminating in a collective embrace amongst the dancers. The *Bolero* can be distantly heard to fade as the *campo* goes silent.

**Act III—Campo S. Maurizio** As the dancers walk towards their next urban act, a theatre of bodies crystallises around them. A frenetic dance begins, generated by wide embracing gestures. The *campo*

is reinterpreted as a contemporary kinetic space; its focal Renaissance perspective is subverted by movement and the organic, indistinguishable three-dimensionality of dancing bodies. The daily flux of tourists become an active counterpart to the scene.

**Act IV—Campo S. Angelo** The most formal of the four acts takes place in the widest of the stages. Dancers crawl and kneel to touch pavements and façades while covered in clay, their bodies resembling the dark trachyte stone ground surface. The climax of the dialogue between bodies and space is now synthesised in a chorus where the architecture itself becomes an actor.

**Epilogue** This contemporary procession is reminiscent of the civic rituals that once took place on the island, today transformed into the queues of tourists awaiting for entrance at the threshold of S. Marco or of Sansovino's Loggetta. Theatre was public space, and vice versa. From the *calle* to the *campo*, it was the image of the city itself that was affirmed and reaffirmed by the presence of people as actors and spectators. The *Biennale Danza* demonstrates the current need for encouraging the heightened artistic and political dimension of the city over its commercial reality, wherever that city may be. ♦

## Don't Drown Belgrade!



Words by Uroš Pajović

Let me tell you about Grigory Potemkin, a self-made Prince, military leader and statesman who was Catherine the Great's lover of choice. In 1783 he became governor of a territory known then as 'New Russia', land that is today southern Ukraine



and Crimea. Upon appointment he was tasked with rebuilding the war-torn region and populating it with Russian settlers.

Shortly after Potemkin had packed his bags and travelled to 'New Russia', the Empress, her court, and several foreign ambassadors embarked on a six-month trip to inspect her newly conquered land. In order to preserve his reputation, Potemkin constructed a series of artificial portable settlements which were to be constructed along the banks of the Dnieper. As the Empress's barge arrived, the villages were hastily assembled and Potemkin's men—dressed as peasants—would temporarily populate them. As the barge left, the villages were disassembled, only to be erected once again further downstream. The things we do for love.



It's 2015 in Belgrade. The *Belgrade Waterfront* project (*Beograd na Vodi* or *Београд на води*, in Serbian) is the masthead for the current government's urban policy: shiny new developments funded by foreign investors.

The project, which has been a media event in itself since 2012, has been initiated by an Abu Dhabi-based developer, Eagle Hills, and bankrolled by UAE investors. The plans mean to raze and redevelop some of the city's oldest neighbourhoods, all centring on a 180-metre tower on the coast of the Sava, along with a shopping mall, the Belgrade Park and the Sava River Promenade.

What the projects' advocates call 'restoration'—having adjusted laws and preservation regulations in order to set formerly protected buildings up for demolition and make way for the project—is a genuine threat to the urban context of Belgrade. The development has attracted the attention of some of the most important names in contemporary Serbian architecture, including Branimir Mitrović, Dragoljub Bakić and Ljubica Slavković. Even Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finn, has said: "I think that [this] is madness. Let a river be a river!"

In order to fight the controversial project and offer alternatives, several initiatives and groups have been formed by members of the architectural community and the city's creative scene, such as *Don't Drown Belgrade* (*Не дави́мо Београд*), who were also responsible for organising a protest on 26 April 2015. Protestors used yellow rubber ducks as symbols of defiance and a collective refusal to accept a plethora of undemocratic state-imposed architectural projects in the city.



The protest of April 2015 was organised directly across the street from the former Belgrade Cooperative Building, a historically charged venue that was annexed by city officials to act as the Belgrade Waterfront Project HQ. They had only made a series of cosmetic changes, so although its façade was reconstructed and its interior freshly painted, its structure remained weak and, ironically, its basement continued to flood.

Prior to the protest the police forced protestors to cross the street to demonstrate on the other side of a roundabout, located in front of the Belgrade Cooperative. They were hoping that the heavy traffic would drown out their voices. Traffic, however, was minimal. At the time when the entourage of foreign investors were set to leave the building, city representatives ordered two trams to stop in the middle of the roundabout (as was later reported by one of the tram drivers) so the protestors would be blocked from view. In the process, passengers from the trams were made to continue their journeys on foot.

A contract—never shown publicly—was signed between the city and the investors. The efforts of the protesters did not go unnoticed, however; it was the first time those opposing the project were featured in mainstream media.<sup>2</sup>

The future of the project—and one of the oldest neighbourhoods in one of the oldest cities in Europe—remains uncertain. This raises questions: does architectural and cultural heritage have an expiry date? Where do a glass skyscraper and other flashy façades fit among a historical European centre and a major riverside? Where do 400,000 apartments fit in the economic landscape of a country with an average monthly income of £270?

Grigoriy Potemkin built entire artificial villages in order to preserve his reputation and impress his loved one. In 2015, others are doing the same, for reasons much more obscure and selfish.

What will we do for love? ♡

- 1 To avoid changing the project master plan, the legally valid 'General Urban Plan for Belgrade' was changed; 'Spatial Plan for Special Purpose' was developed to make way for the project; the 'Building and Planning Act' was changed; the 'Building Height Study for Belgrade' was disregarded; the Belgrade Waterfront *lex specialis* was adopted.
- 2 It was also the first time members of different groups opposing the development united and joined forces—including local residents, of which over 88 families were evicted from the area and given a five-year residence on the city borders.

## Ganesh Chaturthi



Words by Rohan Varma

Mumbai, unlike Chandigarh, New Delhi or even New York City for that matter, is not a city that can be easily defined by its monuments or public spaces. As opposed to the typical planned metropolis—where its identity might be derived from a pre-determined urban plan, such as squares, boulevards or parks—Mumbai, as architect Rahul Mehrotra argues, is better described as a 'Kinetic City'—a place in permanent transition where temporal events, festivals and structures give it a constantly changing character and urban form. Although this is certainly true, what is perhaps even more interesting about Mumbai is its elastic ability to expand, change and modify to accommodate a complete range of different uses and activities. With staggeringly high population densities and limited area (as an island-city bound by water), space in Mumbai is continually recycled, hour after hour, day after day, season after season.

In fact, this elastic urban condition is not limited to Mumbai alone, but is emblematic of much of the rapidly growing urban regions of the Global South. In cities like Mumbai—be it Lagos, Bagota or Jakarta—public space, for example, isn't limited to neatly defined open squares or promenades but can actually be found and generated anywhere: alleyways, streets, courtyards, and even rooftops. Thus, the same street that is used as a busy thoroughfare in the morning is transformed by afternoon into a playground—or perhaps into a festival or market space in the evening, and then back again to a thoroughfare the next morning, only to have the same cycle repeat itself the next day.

In Mumbai, this phenomenon of elasticity is perhaps best seen during the many festivals that take place throughout the year. These temporary events

that celebrate the diversity of India and its many cultures and religions are good examples of the accepting nature of these regions and their willingness to embrace (perhaps out of necessity) the need for using space multifariously. Take *Ganesh Chaturthi*, for example, where for a whole 10 days, courtyards, streets and even left-over spaces under Mumbai's never ending flyovers are transformed into community spill-over areas complete with seating arrangements, pandals and even dance floors! And if this wasn't enough, the tenth and final day of the festival sees processions of thousands of people parade idols of up to five metres high on mini trucks that travel alongside the daily traffic, culminating at the waterfront where the procession disperses.

The same is true at another scale. Due to a lack of space and resources, people are compelled to use busy streets as makeshift mosques by simply kneeling in the direction of Mecca. All the while people, scooters and buses blur by without a glance either way. The duality and simultaneous co-existence of all of these activities make Mumbai unique.

Can architects, urbanists and planners learn from these interlaced processes? Can we learn from the spontaneity and elasticity of life in the developing world to better accommodate different uses and people? And can our designs be flexible and accepting enough to support unforeseen futures? It would require us to think of these urban conditions as new and valid paradigms and see our cities through a different lens. Perhaps it's high time that we do so. ♡

## Sanja Matsuri



Words by Darren Deane

At roughly 7:30PM the last of three ancestral *Kami*—a divine spirit in the Shinto religion—exited the Senso-Ji temple precinct in the Asakusa district of Tokyo. I had been closely observing this event for





'The Dignity of Gestures': Biennale Danza, Venice, 2015.



'Don't Drown Belgrade!': Belgrade Waterfront Protest, 2015.



'Ganesh Chathurti': Mumbai, 2015.



'Kitsch and the Crowds of Versailles': Palace of Versailles.



'Sanja Matsuri': Tokyo, 2015.



'Hope and Peace': View of Place Ville-Marie on occasion of Trudeau election rally May 1968. From Vanlaethem et al Place Ville-Marie: Montréal's shining landmark, 2012 (Commercial Photographers, Fonds d'archives Place Ville-Marie, Montréal).

two years from both near and far. I felt ready; no chance encounter would resist the 'bracketing of meaning' applied by this experienced festive traveller.

The day had started earlier, at 5:00AM, by which time the streets, alleyways and corners (there are no squares or *hiroba*) immediately surrounding the precinct were already saturated with people desperate for their own turn of ritualised hard labour, sat in rows as if to conserve energy. They had good reason to: bearers drawn from all sections of society were about to somehow cope with a collective weight transmitted down through 50 bodies, vertically-crumpled by excessive compression. Like shock-absorbers bearing an extreme topographic difference (between the real city and its idealised paradise) each individual ensured the mediated presence of Asakusa's ancestral past in a the form of a near-horizontal pathway—a geometric sequence soon to be disrupted as the procession made its way to the boundary of the Buddhist precinct, nervous and febrile, ahead of the mounting crowds that await at the Kaminarimon Gate.

The graceful, 12-hour dance of carriers bearing the weight of tradition had been witnessed first hand—from within, not from without—whilst analogous experiential mixtures were interpreted as immanent tensions within the event on nearly every level. There was a sort of 'co-animate slippage' between opaque thing and transparent self; the mobile conflict between a city's sedentary institutions; perceptual supplementation of functional zones, as well as urban voids saturated by a twitching, swaying crowd that cooled into a personified molten state.

This last ambiguity is crucial to understanding how processional and festive space specifically takes hold in a Japanese context, a place where intersections and urban voids are 'replasticised' and reversed into a wax tablet condition, where they become a living intermediary of mobile *Kami* (the crowd as densified pneuma).

Suddenly this everyday junction, designed by traffic planners to facilitate flow, is rematerialised as a medieval space, whose ambiguous pliability transcends the evaporated nothingness of modernity's immediate non-medium. Here crowds alone mean nothing. Indeed, they're often subjected to political exploitation in their naked state unless they are seen as collapsed extensions of urban fabric.

As the housed *Kami* drew closer to the Kaminarimon Gate, one of Asakusa's major intersections, it became saturated by a dense crowd which, in turn, became an agency of the uncanny resulting in a ritual hand-over of the *Mikoshi* (a portable Shinto shrine) across one neighbourhood boundary to the next. The function of the crowd as medium is to house an alternative reality of interior *poches* and re-inscribed

directionalities. The hermeneutic fusion of ordinary horizons is eventually returned to void and infrastructure but with a different ontological status, now superimposed with a value system that twists perception towards new relationships.

Far from forming horizontally additive, anthropological steps (towards an enhanced community) mapped onto pre-existing vessels, this multiple sequence of crowd-based urban dynamics—as a complex situation—constitutes a vertically projective sequence of ontological states moving between the one and the many in a genuine act of 'decreation':

*To uproot oneself socially and vegetatively  
To exile oneself from every earthly country  
...is a substitute for decreation  
It results in unreality  
Uprooting oneself one seeks greater reality  
Simone Weil, Decreation. ♦*

## Hope and Peace: Place Ville-Marie



Words by Mark Pimlott

The public spaces of North American cities are to be found in unorthodox conditions, often due to the fact that the street predominates urban life. Buildings tend to address the street in a straightforward way, almost ignoring their capacity to create places in which people might become more conscious of themselves as a public. In the United States, public space can be found more often than not in urban parks that—from the 19th Century, due to the attentions of Frederick Law Olmsted—drew upon existing topographical features in order to represent that Edenic territory subsumed by the American



project of territorialisation and urbanisation. Canada followed the American model naturally. In Montréal, Olmsted's work on Mount Royal—the city's dominant topographical feature—and the anglicised garden squares in the middle of the city offered an anti-urban image. Neither Montréal's conventional nor monumental buildings inspired properly civic spaces: even its city hall sits on the street indifferently, shunning the opportunity to address the historical centre's market square. That the centrepiece of the city's most ambitious urban development of the 1960s, Place Ville-Marie, should have proposed a set of buildings with a representative urban space at its centre—and one that suggested a relation to Mount Royal along a monumental visual axis—is singular.

The designers of Place Ville-Marie—leoh Ming Pei, urban planner Vincent Ponte and project architect Henry N. Cobb—modelled the development on the networks of Grand Central Terminal and the urban enclave of the Rockefeller Center in New York City. The project was the product of the ambitions of its renowned developer William Zeckendorf. Place Ville-Marie itself was the culminating ensemble of a 'multi-level downtown core' that spanned three city blocks, traversed by interior pedestrian concourses just beneath ground level and, at ground level, the great square (or *Place*).

It was cast as an ideal space in the Renaissance mould. The design of buildings around it coordinated—with an opening to the north looking toward Mount Royal and McGill University—along the axis of a then poorly defined grand avenue. This became the so-called 'English axis' representing, perhaps inadvertently, the hegemony of the English-speaking minority's business class. Although most people would cross the site directly in the concourse directly beneath, it was hoped that the Place itself would be active. Thus, an elaborate planned programme of daily events, organised by Zeckendorf's office, was developed to ensure that it would be. The Place was intended to acquire a position akin to the courtyard and skating rink at Rockefeller Center: care was taken that the Place's structure could support an elephant if one was needed. Scheduled happenings thus unfolded from the summer of 1963: exhibitions, fairs and community events characterised these orderly affairs.

Yet the architects had envisioned the Place as a true civic space in which unpredictable, unplanned events might occur: impromptu public gatherings and even demonstrations. There were indeed natural, impromptu spectacles on the Place that lived up to the architects' hopes. These did not necessarily correspond fully with the hopes of the client—the Canadian National Railways' president Donald Gordon—whose 1,200-room flagship hotel, completed in 1958, faced directly onto the Place

and was the southern terminus of the 'English axis'. The time of the project's conception and construction was tumultuous for Montréal and Québec society; the French-speaking majority—who had been historically repressed by a corrupt provincial government, the anglophone business class and the Roman Catholic Church—revolted silently and occasionally violently. In 1954, Gordon decided to name the hotel 'The Queen Elizabeth', causing much protest among the increasingly resentful majority. When in 1962 he explained to a parliamentary committee that there were no francophones among his 17 vice-presidents because none were adequately qualified, more protests were held in the Place directly opposite the hotel and his body was burned in effigy. This was the moment at which the symbolic urbanism of Place Ville-Marie assumed its true political aspect, not because of the beauty and harmony of its design, but because it embodied the deeply embedded power structures of the city.

A civic identity more benign, and reassuring to the tenants around the Place was realised in the election campaign rally for the federalist Liberal party leader Pierre Elliott Trudeau, held in May 1968. At this event, the Place was swamped by a crowd of 100,000, all heady with 'Trudeaumania', who had heard his call for national—and multi-cultural—unity.

Beyond these events, the Place never quite became the truly civic place the architects had imagined: it was, in the end, more a plaza for prestige offices than one woven into and representative of civic life. The ultimate owners of the complex—the Trizec Corporation—saw the Place as problematic, and between 1985 and 1986 remodelled both it and the pedestrian concourse below (the 'Galerie des boutiques') along more anodyne lines. The Place was altered in a manner described by Raymond Affleck—the principal partner of the project's original executive architects ARCOP—as more suitable to the Canadian experience: as a landscape. Transformed into a setting of quadrants of lawns with trees, surrounded with benches and separated by garden paths, the Place is now devoid of any urbanity, any event or any dissent. ♦

## Kitsch and the Crowds of Versailles



Words by Brendan Cormier

I am waiting in line outside the Palace of Versailles. It's an incredible line. A crowd stretched thin, thousands of people long, snaking several times up and down the ostentatiously large forecourt. It's a midsummer day with a heat wave upon us and no shade in sight. People have turned their tourist maps into makeshift hats and shading devices as we wait to enter the Sun King's abode.

What are we doing here? People from all parts of the globe have assembled, and for most there's little question of turning back. The 20 minute train ride from Paris is long enough to stay committed, despite the foreboding wait ahead. And so we are captive. While it's evident that we're all suffering, the general mood is affable. We are, after all, standing before something incredible—the splendour of riches, a place of mythological grandeur.

Inside, hours later, the heat subsides but the crowd persists. Herded like cattle, hacking through a forest of selfie sticks, one can get an occasional glimpse of an old wall covering or a strangely proportioned bed. The flow of the crowd keeps you shuffling forward and there's hardly space to reflect on the objects around. But that misses the point. The message is already clear, the mission accomplished. You are in the Palace of Versailles. Take a picture.

As museums go, Versailles is a classic honeypot. It need do nothing, and tourists will still flock to it. There are only a few signifiers a visitor will expect:

that it is big, that it looks expensive, that it is old and that it is called the Palace of Versailles. Beyond that, all expectations are satisfied. Geo-tagged photos have already been uploaded as bragging rights. It's a tautological loop. People go to the Palace of Versailles because it is the Palace of Versailles. And that's it.

Milan Kundera, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, has some incredible lines about kitsch, one of which is worth quoting in full:

"The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind the multitudes can share. Kitsch may not, therefore, depend on an unusual situation; it must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running on the grass, the motherland betrayed, first Jove.

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass!

The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes the kitsch kitsch.

The brotherhood of men on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch."

Versailles is a complex site, the trigger for excess, power games, violence, bloodshed, revolution and eventually democracy. How many extraordinary situations have occurred at Versailles? How many strange stories can be told? How much richness can we extract from that history? And yet here we are with preconceived images engraved in our minds, basic ideas about opulence and greatness, true or false, which the museum hardly tries to challenge but instead reinforces.

Why challenge? Because that is what a museum is supposed to do. It is often said that a museum's job is to break conventions, dispel myths and provide new interpretations and narratives. When a museum stops being challenging, when it rides on its own tautological value, it inevitably descends into an economy of kitsch. And in that deepest recess, we find Versailles.

I start to think that having us all line up in the forecourt was an ingenious ploy on the part of the management—a sort of display of the multitude. It is the perfect affirmation that we are all here to see something significant, even if that true significance is rarely explored in all its uncomfortable details. How many sins were committed at Versailles? How many rapes? Murders? The crowd is a giant white noise machine, drowning out these narratives. The crowd is the essential lubricant for kitsch.



Meanwhile, looking out among my fellow travellers, I find myself paraphrasing Kundera: How nice to see Versailles. How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by Versailles. ♦

## Reception Rooms



Words by Hikaru Nissanke and Jon Lopez

The advent of modern broadcast technology has profoundly contributed to the reorganisation of our routines and rituals. During the early 20th Century, wireless radio successfully enshrined itself as a permanent fixture in virtually every home. So much so that King George VI opted to deliver his iconic 1939 speech, announcing Britain's intention to go to war, over the wireless, prior to emerging on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to address the city. Broadcast technology had unwittingly grafted part of civic life into the domestic DNA of the home.

Today, the continued development and accessibility of this technology has both accelerated this change and potentially altered its trajectory. The traditional perception of broadcasts being controlled by the state and private companies—who carefully record, curate and programme content—is unravelling. Across the globe, individuals have been quick to both embrace and adapt to this technology. New behavioural patterns, social norms and etiquettes have emerged as people become fluent in, and accustomed to, broadcasting every aspect of their lives.

In the city, broadcast technology has continued to emancipate acts of public protest and celebration from traditional civic centres by providing a complementary and alternative platform through which to commune with others. This has neither undermined

nor diminished such centres' roles; on the contrary, the image-based nature of these technologies has underlined a stage-like quality in our civic spaces, a backdrop against which the complexities of life are now simultaneously acted out, recorded and disseminated across the globe.

At home, however, the impact of broadcast technology is perhaps much more pronounced, as the fortunes of modern modes of living have waxed and waned with each technological development. The hearth—as the traditional focus of family life—was superseded by radio and television as families and communities turned to broadcast as a shared form of recreation and civic life. Now, every member of a family is likely to own a mobile device and, as the same psychological relationship with and dependency to broadcast technology prevails, domestic life has been readily and fundamentally reordered and splintered across the house. This not only calls into question the continued dominance of the reception room in a home, but also whether interior domestic space should assume some manner of representational quality, as it is itself broadcast back to the city. Therein lies a strange contradiction: whilst public space is increasingly figured as private, our private domestic spaces are increasingly broadcast and shared more than ever.

Formerly, the threshold between public and private was mediated by the front door and building façade. However, broadcast technology has simultaneously blurred, overlaid, compressed and erased traditional boundaries and conceptions of space and inhabitation. It is beyond doubt that a century of unidirectional broadcasts, from civic to domestic, has fundamentally altered the use of private space. What is less clear is how the relatively new inversion of this phenomenon, i.e. private to public, might have an impact on the city. Will broadcast technology imbue our civic spaces with the idiosyncrasies of the domestic life? And if so, how might this manifest and how should architects regard and respond to such developments? ♦

# Discussion held on 31 July 2015, 140 Hampstead Road



Darren Deane, Hikaru Nissanke,  
Jon Lopez and James Taylor-Foster met up  
to discuss the seven essay responses.

**James Taylor-Foster** In the previous issue of LOBBY, the Seminar Room started to explore the interaction between people—crowds, in particular—and the contemporary city. Two texts, one by Elias Canetti and another by Peter Carl, provoked a conversation about the interdependence between architecture, urbanism and the ordinary (and extraordinary) inhabitation of the city. In this incarnation of the Seminar Room we've taken this investigation one step further, sparked by Pink Floyd's 1989 *Delicate Sound of Thunder* tour.

**Hikaru Nissanke** I found the case study you offered particularly compelling because it begins to tease out notions of tolerance and capacity—whether cities like Venice are actually able to deal with events of this kind.

**Jon Lopez** I suppose it also starts to raise questions about the management and ownership of the city, and that moment of tension between the notion of who owns the city and who's actually in charge.

Perhaps it's a tacit agreement that on 'festive occasions' citizens are permitted to claim a part of the city, even if it's an outpouring of festive activity that occurs at a pre-arranged time. And this is something that Hikaru and I are quite interested in. We touched upon it in our article about who controls the broadcasts, the medium of the broadcasts and how a festival or carnival—or even a political protest—is disseminated.

**James** Yes—in your piece you discuss democratisation through broadcasting, but is there nothing more democratic than the physicality of public space itself, and its occupation through protest? In Rohan Varma's essay, there is the suggestion that festive events in Mumbai are not only spectacles in themselves. As processions and marches (secular or religious) pass through the city, day-to-day life continues simultaneously. There's a resulting poetic collision between these ordinary and extraordinary events which is played out on the streets.

In Venice, or any other western metropolis, the city has a slightly different consistency; a different capacity to host these types of events. Although the act itself is very similar the way it interacts with the streets, alleyways, squares, parks and riverbanks is quite different.

**Hikaru** But do you think it is this way because of the density of the city? That these two 'things' are forced to coexist, merge, overlay?

**James** Absolutely. But I think that it's also a matter of culture. In a conversation I had with Rohan recently, he mentioned how the *sari* has in fact many uses. Not only is it something to wear, but it's also something to use as shelter—when dampened, for example, it has the ability to block out the sun and cool you down.

**Jon** It's almost an analogy of the city.  
**Darren** So are we suggesting that this sort of activity—let's say 'festive activity'—is more politically useful in non-western cities today? And does it have something to do with those types



of events constructing a clearing; constructing political space through density, through overlay, through superimposition? If this is the case then perhaps those spaces have already been structured, but in Western cities they've gone through some sort of process of democratisation? Are we saying that the practice of using a crowd (or spectacle) overlay with the everyday is actually a precursor to the definition of the public sphere?

**Hikaru** Perhaps, but it might not be a precursor. It could be that they're just very distinct cultures and that over time the West has just taken a different trajectory. Both are equally valid, it's rather that they've evolved and ossified into different traditions.

**James** Another 'culture' that was explored by you, Darren, is that of Japan's.

**Darren** Yes—in Tokyo the square is known as the *harobo*, and there is a distinct lack of these types of spaces in the topography that I've described in my essay. But they happen nonetheless. It's almost as if something else needs to be added to the city in order for that clearing to emerge and to take hold.

I've looked at a lot of case studies of this type over the last six years and what is telling about all of them is that they are underpopulated—not just the density of buildings but of people too, and of crowd density. In the UK, in comparison to what I've witnessed in Tokyo, these kind of events are often under attended and take place in a pre-prepared space. Consequently, the procession or festival becomes an object or void rather than a morass.

**Hikaru** Japan has a shortage of land to build on and the city's density is often greater. I wonder whether the same overlay principle happens but rather than it being the *coexistence* of festivals occurring simultaneously, the festival itself actually bleeds from the street into the home?

**Jon** When talking about the *Sanja Matsuri*—which is, from what I understand, a constantly shifting mass of different processional routes that occasionally interconnect—I suppose it's not really about the typical crescendo of arriving in a big public square. It's more about the relationship

between public (the street) and private (the home).

**Darren** It helps us make sense of what has happened at the Pink Floyd concert in Venice, perhaps. You end up with a kind of objectification of the festival as a spectacle, rather than a genuine device for producing space.

**Hikaru** And most of us have an image of Venice that we've constructed in our heads that we want to preserve. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and so it has a restricted evolution in comparison to a normal city.

“You end up with a kind of objectification of the festival as a spectacle, rather than a genuine device for producing space.”

**Darren** There's both pros and cons about this concert as a case study. There's an obvious correlation between Aldo Rossi and the floating stage, but here it almost begins from the outside in. There's a broken connection between the people in the *piazza* and the stage because of a body of water; that mass is then displaced into the city. The festival is already backing its way *into* the city rather than spontaneously occurring *from* the city—it's a different way of working with the space.

**Hikaru** There's also a nice undercurrent in your piece about Venice, James, in relation to how the crowd negotiated the city. On an institutional level, the floating stage was forced to be pushed further into the water and away from the *piazza*. There are all of these forces at play: the organic mass of people

and how they behave, but also this more formal setting of the 'boardroom'.

**James** Perhaps similar to what Uroš Pajović described in his essay about the Belgrade Waterfront Protest earlier this year, in which trams were positioned by the authorities in an attempt to screen out the protestors from a gathering of foreign investors. The idea of containment.

**Jon** This protest reads like a sketch show. The image of these bureaucrats all running around trying to stop the trams outside the co-operative building in Belgrade in order to hide a group of people walking around with inflatable ducks! It has visual correlations to the Venetian Carnival.

**Darren** Perhaps it's a question about historical continuity. Urban history plays a key role in most of the essays presented in this seminar: how we play with that history, and whether or not we agree with it determines whether they are accepted as part of the life of the city or if it becomes a denial or imposition of some kind.

**James** Yes—in your piece, Hikaru and Jon, I found your observation about how King George VI's declaration of World War II was broadcast from Buckingham Palace over the radio, before he emerged onto the balcony to address the city, very interesting. I suppose this was a seminal moment in broadcasting that has spatial associations? The balcony of Buckingham Palace—strongly associated with the British head of state and her (or his) family—alongside the Victoria Memorial—an icon of tradition and the 'power of empire'—and the Mall paved in red tarmac, are three elements which combine to create a fragment of the city from which the Empire was traditionally addressed. I suppose that this has now practically been dissolved into the airwaves, but the processional events which persist—like the Queen's Birthday Parade or the State Opening of Parliament—are often a potent mix of procession and a highly controlled semi-festive event, defined by a crowd. Specific routes are created, barricades are erected, and so on.

**Darren** Yes, and this example raises the question of how to differentiate between a procession and a festival. To go back to Venice, I think that the 1989 concert was more of a festival-like



Fig. 1: 2013 Papal Conclave, Piazza San Pietro, Vatican City.





Aldo Rossi's *Teatro del Mondo*, Venice, 1979.

“Has the advent of broadcast technology fundamentally re-ordered how we understand and inhabit space?”

scenario. You've got a relatively static bunch of people acting in public space, whereas a procession is a group of individuals following in a line. Are they different or are they the same?

**James** Well formally they're very different, I suppose. I think that their meaning is also quite different—maybe it's got something to do with the semi-static nature of the crowd against the mobile nature of a procession...

**Darren** ...which is driven by time. Beginning, middle, end.

**Hikaru** But what if it loops like Notting Hill Carnival?

**Darren** That's where it becomes interesting. Perhaps it's a conversion of one into the other? For that to happen you need some sort of weakness in the route. You need some contestation from one in order for it to become the other.

**Jon** I would love to see the Notting Hill Carnival maps for the strategy that the police develop—to 'kettle' various

groups of people and remove access down certain roads, and so on. It often ends up that your friends are one side of the police cordon and you're over on the other, and the only way to get to one another is to find a more imaginative way around. Jumping over garden fences, for example...

**Hikaru** In our essay, we were really trying to grapple with what civic and festive space is *today*. Has the advent of broadcast technology fundamentally re-ordered how we understand and inhabit space? For example the building we're sat in, which is now the temporary home for the Bartlett, was once something else—but the spaces are still essentially the same. Glastonbury was on the radio as we were writing, and there was a feeling that in the act of listening live we were partaking in the event itself.

So I suppose we're asking whether or not people crave civic life in their home? Just as the hearth was replaced by the television, and we've evolved from the wireless, the home still needed a cohesive element. The television brought people together. Now technology has splintered itself, become more mobile, and fractured this idea. Family life has now splintered as a result: kids are in their bedrooms, everyone has their own independent room where they can engage with their own individual world.

**Jon** Spatially speaking, the crucial point is that until now, this has always occurred in the reception room. It's only within the last decade that it has started to invade other parts of the home. Does the proliferation of this kind of technology mean that physical civic spaces have decreased in importance? Or does the connectivity of technology enforce those as civic centres?

**James** I always find this photograph of the 2013 Papal Conclave in *Piazza San Pietro* placed quite telling (fig. 1). It shows how compelled we are to document and broadcast live, civic events.

**Hikaru** This is just civic life today, and I don't think that it has at all displaced or undermined our civic centres. Jon and I are quite keen to stress that all it does is provide a complementary platform upon which to arrange those gatherings or to share special moments after said gatherings.

**James** Brendan Cormier tackles this idea from a slightly different angle in his examination of Versailles. I find it interesting that both he and you [Jon and Hikaru] independently broached the idea of social broadcasting and digital sharing in relation to festive space. Brendan specifically discussed the geo-tagging of photos in the queue into Versailles, for example.

**Hikaru** Experiences become like collectables, which I guess is nothing new.

**James** But now they're geo-tagged, *rapidly sharable* collectables!

**Jon** Is the future nature of civic space in danger, do you think? In London especially there is a trend towards privatisation. For example, there's a growing debate about shutting down Notting Hill Carnival because some of the residents have found it objectionable. I wonder if the physical outpouring of people is enough to resist the overarching management or power structure of the city?

**Darren** Maybe it's a sign for something that is no longer there. You can compare it with the growth of the London Guilds. They first take on a location, then there's a gift, there's a greenhouse tank tacked onto the side and suddenly you have an urban block. Then festivals begin to demarcate a wider influence—a *sphere* of influence if you like—and before you know it you have the city.

There is, within that, a deeper idea to do with the value we place on space in order to find much of the city, but also the way in which we define space to determine territory, our laws, and our public spaces. When the institutions and the communities fall away you don't need the space anymore. In other words, for them to survive, they require *depth*. ♦

# The Lift



# TOURIST CITY



Words and Photography by Evan Rawn



Perceived by visitors as a collection of monumental artefacts and rarely understood as part of an inhabited urban fabric, Rome is a city cursed by its riches. Constrained by visions of its illustrious past, one finds it hard to describe modern Rome in the context of other contemporary cities. Its narrow cobblestone streets, lively piazzas and crumbling ruins are but a few of the unique features that simultaneously provide its lifeblood, yet hold the city up as a stagnant ideal, devoid of cultural and economic growth. This begs the question, how does one live in a city that is always looking backwards? And what are the consequences of Rome's perpetual defiance towards architecture and development in the modern age?

Rome is one of many European cities currently grappling with the difficult question of living in a 'museum city'. As prices in its historic centre continue to climb, the authentic Roman citizen is forced to the periphery of mundane and repetitive low-rise apartments. Walking the streets of the historic centre, one is hard-pressed to avoid those ever-present hordes of creatures donning lanyard headsets and matching t-shirts. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the city's image is mass-produced and made permanent by a collection of postcards cropped away from their context. Rather than a haphazard

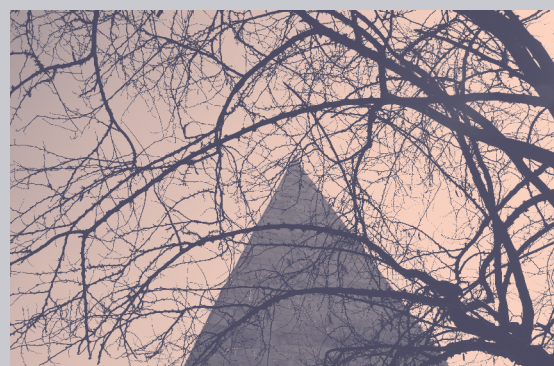
collection of scattered landmarks, the city should be understood as a living system like any other.

To those passing through, Rome will never cease to be the cliché it presents to outsiders. But in slowing down, spending some time, and embracing everyday life, one may hope to find something meaningful here. What Rome lacks in contemporary buildings and infrastructure, it more than makes up for in a rich tapestry of historical architecture, art and a respect for public space. To Romans, the many fragments of ancient columns, Borromini fountains and Renaissance and Baroque churches are mere fixtures on the walk to work or school each day. But at the same time, Romans possess a tremendous pride for their city, and so they fight to preserve their cultural treasures and the features that make this city unique. This was made evident with the outpouring of dismay that took place in February 2015 when some overzealous Dutch soccer fans damaged the historic Bernini fountain in *Piazza di Spagna*, and is reaffirmed each time locals fight against attempts to replace their beloved cobblestone streets with asphalt.

The rest of us will never know what it truly feels like to call a city with so much history our own. Despite its precarious reputation as a 'museum city', Rome can offer many valuable lessons to contemporary



cities. In fact, what struck me the most about Rome was how its urban layout and architectural characteristics, both somewhat frozen in time, facilitated a unique way of life. Buildings in the historic centre are not particularly hospitable to housing large commercial stores simply due to their small scale, and this has allowed for the preservation of local businesses and everyday rituals in the form of outdoor markets. These daily rituals are further enabled by the prevalence of walking and public transportation, which instils a sense of freedom and belonging not found in the rapidly growing suburbs of the world.



Rome is known for its wealth of history and culture, but what constitutes the cultural life of the city today? Recent architecture in the historic centre can be difficult to spot, while contemporary galleries in Rome will always sit in the shadow of the legacies of Michelangelo, Raphael, Bernini and countless other great masters. Perhaps there is little room for innovation in a city overfilled with priceless works of art and architecture, but such an inspirational place keeps producing its own emerging talents. During my brief stay in the city I was pleasantly surprised at the number of local architectural practices, photographers, artists and designers I crossed paths with. I met people who always have and always will be glad

to call Rome their home, no matter how outnumbered they are by tourists. I was able to see beyond the city's artificial façade manufactured for tourists and get a glimpse into its everyday life.

Of course, much of Rome has been preserved for good reasons and architecture must take on a more subtle role in this unique context. Rather than attempting to erect bold declarations of modernity that will look tawdry in 20 years, architects working in the historic centre must exhibit the upmost restraint to make urban life in Rome sustainable. However, we must remember that the life of the city today extends far beyond the boundaries of the ancient Aurelian Walls, and a lack of foresight has resulted in an outer periphery that looks as if it could exist anywhere other than Rome. The challenge that lies ahead forces us to question how the city will seek to grow organically from the inside out, or risk turning the historic centre into a theme park, even further removed from the life of its citizens. ♦





# THE DEFINITIVE TRAVELOGUE



Words by Mrinal S. Rammohan  
Photography by Stylianos Giamarelos, Loukas Triantis,  
Vasilis Vasiliadis and Christina Vasilopoulou

Photography: Vasilis Vasiliadis.

Owing to the commodification of history, most capital cities of the western world are often reduced to a single representation of a building or monument. Paris has the Eiffel Tower, Rome the Colosseum and Athens the Parthenon. Most histories are also embellished by legend and myth—their complexities reduced and encapsulated into digestible bits to suit the short attention span of the world-weary tourist.

The bucket-list approach to holidaying has intensified the obsession with image. Take that selfie, touch that stone, buy an 'I Heart NY/London/Riga' tee, and look for the nearest exit to a McDonald's. It's a seven-day, nine-city whistle-stop tour through Europe—all tickets, entrance fees and meals included. Every hour accounted for, the *hammam* bath and winery tour crammed into the itinerary—we're probably never coming back—it's now or never.

"You're not going to Santorini?! You should definitely take an island-hopping cruise. You take the metro to get to Piraeus directly from the airport. You can easily do up to two islands in a day. What are you going to do in Athens for five days? There's only the Acropolis to visit, not much else."

No, thank you. I have no idea what I'm going to be doing in Athens, but that's the whole point of going somewhere you've never been—you revel in its novelty. Or at least what remains as novel and unknown. Crossing borders in the modern age has no sense of adventure. Visa applications must be appended with a full and final itinerary.

Our first encounter with a city is almost never the first time we visit it. We've seen it in the movies, through Google Street View and other people's holiday photographs. I'm sure I had an image of Athens in my mind before I got there. I just don't remember it. I often wonder about places we've never visited, how we imagine them to be and when we finally arrive, those images are instantaneously replaced by what lies in front of us.



Photography: (top image) Loukas Triantis, (bottom image) Christina Vasilopoulou.

An eroding memory of Athens now resides in my mind. This morning I read about some more protests on Syntagma Square—it jars with the image of the quietly flowing marble fountain in my mind. I remember the sickly sweet almond dessert I tasted nearby and the wholesome, flaky *spanakopita*—the delicious filled pastry I had as my breakfast staple for the entire trip. These memories will soon fade and be replaced by the overwhelming narrative as a place of protest and violence.

On TV there are images of people queuing up to use the ATMs, a mass exodus on the horizon of people belonging to a lost generation, hopeless jokes about the Greeks stashing their life savings in their freezers—cold storage is cold comfort. The scenes are in marked contrast to what I saw during my visit.

"We're not holding our breath for a miracle."

But there is no trace of despair in this statement. The Greeks are an extremely realistic people. Hardship is met with a casual shrug of the shoulder, everything happens *sigá-sigá* (slowly-slowly); Athens is the city of slowness. Perhaps the length of its own history serves to stretch the notion of time—to not live each day of your life as your last, but to believe in the infinity of each moment. To accept that Greek coffee is just Turkish coffee made in Greece is to reject the very idea that life is a competition. While we slug it out to find the authentic way to make a Flat White,





Photography: Loukas Triantis

Photography: (top image) Stylianos Giamarellos, (bottom image) Vasilis Vasiliadis



the Greeks are busy enjoying their coffee—or Turkey's—it hardly matters.

In the pursuit of authenticity, we long for an authentic experience but have an instinctive distrust for unfamiliarity. I asked for recommendations from Greek friends—on where to stay, what to eat, where not to walk. If I was going to be there for five days, I wanted it to capture the essence of Athens in that brief moment—to know what it felt like to be an Athenian, to drink where the locals do, to eat their food.

“There is nothing called Athenian cuisine.”

That's what our tour guide said at the beginning of the Athens' guided food tour—so much for authenticity. The food we ate though was

mind-blowingly good. Franco-Greek tapas, Syrian-Turkish wraps, Spanish-inspired charcuterie—it was a smorgasbord of history, each new cuisine with its own story. Is it right to call them a separate cuisine? Where does one draw that line in the sand separating one from the other? Even the ubiquitous *souvlaki* has a thousand fathers (or mothers).

Conservation is a romantic idea that claims legitimacy through history. In a world obsessed with preservation we fail to account for progress and change. The Parthenon was a temple, treasury, church, mosque and a munitions store at different times throughout its history—what should it be restored to? How do you restore something without erasing another part of its history? The Acropolis is not a part of Athens—it is divorced from it. It is sold to us as an experience, but it is entirely devoid of it. To go to Athens in search of authenticity is futile. You find yourself confronted with a heaving metropolis that is constantly reinventing itself. That reinvention is manifesting itself today in the mass protests, which are a fight for dignity, for the chance to forge their own destiny, to say no to a predetermined future. Contemporary Athens has no real link with its ancient counterpart, other than perhaps a geographical co-location with the Acropolis. It has a complex and contested history that goes beyond the scattered ruins of white marble that demands to be continually rewritten. It is a history that cannot be reduced to a single image, nor can it be done justice to in a single visit. ♦



# SERVICE? HAMRA? OKAY, YALLA!



Words and Photography by Ryan Ross



'Yalla: a phrase you will hear everywhere in Beirut. Yalla! Let's go!'

Trying to give and receive directions in a foreign country—especially when you don't speak the predominate language—can be a daunting experience. Doing so in a city where there is no continuity of street names or addresses, is even more overwhelming. Such was my realisation when visiting the capital of Lebanon: Beirut.

Located on the peninsula on Lebanon's Mediterranean coast, Beirut is a city of dichotomies, of contradictions and of many linguistic twists and turns. Although all Lebanese people speak Arabic, a large number are bilingual (or trilingual) in a combination of Arabic, French and English. In Beirut, the second or third language often coincides with the community in which you grow up, with French being the predominant second language in the traditionally Christian areas from the eastern parts of the city, and English being the predominant second language in its traditionally Muslim western areas. The reality is that most people will end up communicating in a mixture of at least two languages, if not adding in words from a third.

As a student of architecture researching high-rises in Beirut, navigating the city attempting to find old buildings, new buildings, sites for buildings that aren't even built yet and many other spaces, is part







of my call of duty. In many cities, one just gets into a taxi and says an address, but navigation in Beirut is not that simple. First, you have to find a taxi—or, if you are in the know, you will hail a taxi as a *service* (*sehr-vees*). This will not be difficult, as almost all *service* drivers will constantly honk their horns at every person they pass as a way of communicating their availability. Second, you will have to negotiate whether this will indeed be a *service* or not.

A *service* is a registered taxi on the street which you hail down, and it may also be shared with other people heading in the same direction. It does not have a meter, but rather a very hawkish driver who will determine whether he wants to drive to the area that you have stated, as well as whether the amount you are offering is enough for him to warrant driving you there. After you agree on a price, you jump in. The next hurdle then presents itself: explaining where—within the larger geographical area stated at the beginning of the transaction—you would like to go. This is not accomplished by stating an address. Much more often, you name some landmarks on certain known roads in the area, further complicated by the fact that street names are not consistent across languages or communities.



**Me** *Bta'arif* Paul on the corner of Rue Gouraud?  
(Do you know the Paul on the corner of Gouraud Street?)

**Driver** *La'*. (No)

**Me** *Bta'arif* Kahwet Leila *haad-el* Police sur Rue Gouraud? (Do you know Café Leila next to the Police on Gouraud Street?)

**Driver** *Ei*. (Yes)

**Me** *Ei, hon*. (Yes, here)

Confused, ad hoc, multilingual. Many people would be nervous and apprehensive about entering a taxi without having given an address and without the full ability to communicate to the driver in detail. However, the reality is you get to know the city a lot better and learn some useful vocabulary in the meantime.

When it is necessary to know names of areas and landmarks within that area, you begin to have a much more intimate knowledge of a city; the mental map you form will be much more complete and detailed. You will also inevitably learn small things from drivers about the city even if you don't have a language in common—they point out interesting landmarks you wouldn't have noticed, tell you names of neighbourhoods you wouldn't have known or even take you to incredible restaurants owned by friends or family.

There is much to be said about informal means of transport. A systematised and official public transport system is to be lauded, but it often means you can travel around a city without getting to know the geography or understanding how you get from one point to another. Although you may miss the convenience and ease of a more logical, pragmatic means of public transport—such as the London Tube—don't always lament the lack of a similar system. Instead, embrace the local particularities; you might end up discovering a different city. ♡



# BEYOND THE GLOSSY ARCHITECTURE?



Words and Photography by Maryam Mudhaffar



The United Arab Emirates' city of Dubai has been central in discussions around global and urban theory. Much is being said about its trading practices, economic value and multi-cultural population, along with its movement of labour and technology across international borders. The context in which it has evolved, although highly criticised, is different to other global cities to which it is usually compared. Dubai has always been cosmopolitan considering the city's history of migration and trade patterns with Persia and the Indian subcontinent, as evidenced by the variety of languages spoken by the older generations. Today, we find two levels of cosmopolitan contexts in the Emirate, one that has always been part of 'Old Dubai'—even pre-union—and the emerging metropolis based on the post-oil building boom in 'New Dubai'—with different demographics and class distribution.

New and Old Dubai work together to form the most 'liberal' of the seven Emirates, but there's more to the city than what is portrayed in mass media. Similarly, there is more to how that capital was created historically, in relation to the union of the Emirates, the discovery of oil and the urban planning of its deserts. One cannot possibly discuss a city like Dubai in theory or representation without preconceived notions and formulated points of view. The tendency to classify certain classes and genders in the city as either an oppressive state or a glamorous materialistic one eliminates the true experience of human

interchange as a priority. For these reasons, an open mind is necessary to comprehend the different contexts in which global cities are experienced and developed, especially when compared to the growth of European and American capitals.

For instance, the historic Basktiyah neighbourhood consisting of old houses, shops and mosques built between 1890–1940 is the most famous site of Old Dubai—a definite touristic attraction for those who want to experience a fragment of the city's culture. Although those settlements are now used mainly for commercial uses, there are other parts of Old Dubai that have remained true to their original programme. On the other side of the *khour* (creek), the *mina* (sea port) is busy with shiploads of exports and imports brought in daily; the *souqs* (markets) are filled with both buyers and sellers looking for deals on spices, fabrics and gold; and the *sikkahs* (narrow passages) are occupied with conversations between people to whom this Dubai has been home for the past decades.

These people—a mixture of local and non-local residents who frequent these central spaces on a daily basis—often feel lost or out-of-place when faced with the new high-rise developments in New Dubai just a few miles away; it is a bit too 'foreign' for them to familiarise with. Although these parts of Old Dubai used to be occupied mainly by Emiratis, Persians and Indians, the city's urban sprawl, change in housing practice and gentrification attempts, have





shifted the spatial dynamic; the people who lived there have mostly moved out, but many of them kept their family businesses running, despite opening other branches in newer parts of the city. Some local values remain in these hidden gems of the city, values that can only be recognised by someone who knows the city inside out, someone who can haggle and then break bread with the shop owner.

Planning strategies in urban studies have always been highly criticised and objected to. In the case of Dubai and its deserts, a planning scheme had to start somehow; they chose to do it using top-down strategies in aspiration for local modernity, global recognition and marketable investments. The city's top-down approach included projects like the man-made Palm and World islands, the world's tallest building Burj Khalifa, the biggest shopping centre The Dubai Mall and a 'Smart City' plan and 'housing for all' design proposals, all enhanced by the ruler's vision and the government's resources.

A positive outcome of these changes can be noticed in how parts of Old Dubai have been left more or less intact. As sociologist Manuel Castells claims, "Space is not a reflection of society; it is its expression". Although having aspired to become the 'superlative' city, with the tallest and largest built objects, certain parts of Old Dubai still stand defiantly amidst these endless facades of steel and glass skyscrapers. Also, the lower-income parts of Old Dubai have maintained their validity both functionally and visually within the urban network of the Emirate. These somewhat 'true' remnants of what Dubai means to the locals are the experiential



turning point of this setting. So, are these small settlements of mud-brick and coral stone giving the finger to their modern and shiny colonisers? There is, after all, a Dubai beyond the glossy architecture. ♦



# The Staircase



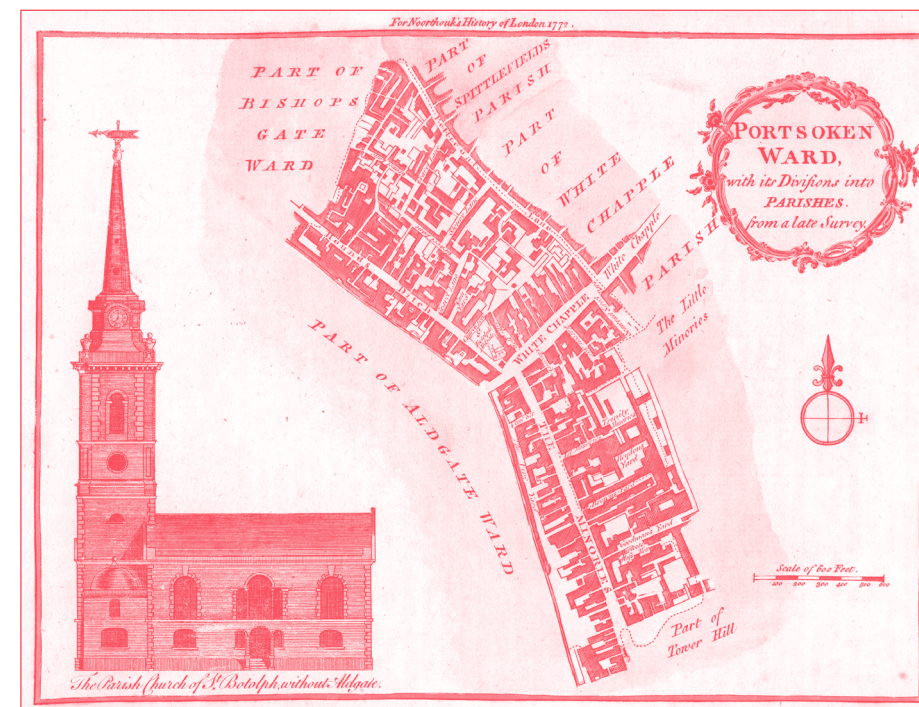
# The Paradox of City Walls



ENCLOSURE, BOUNDARY, BARRIER

Words by Laura Vaughan

Image: Jonathan Potter Ltd.



Portsoken Ward published in Northouck's "History Of London", 1772.

In his history of Western civilization, *Flesh and Stone*, Richard Sennett, writes that although the Jewish inhabitants of the Ghetto of Venice were obliged to live in isolation, their manner of segregation also provided for their bodily security against persecution. This is one of several paradoxical characteristics of walls, which are typically viewed from one side or the other: either as enclosure or as defensive boundary. Viewed from the outside, the inhabitants of the Ghetto were defined by their otherness and were bound by strict rules of coming and going, yet one outcome of their enforced segregation was the fostering of a rich culture of music, language and scholarship, that might otherwise have not evolved. Another paradox of walls is that they have a thickness which itself carries a material importance: walls can be inhabited, like old London Bridge or are traversed—nowadays typically by tourists, treading the stone groove imprinted by guards patrolling the walls in days gone by, imagining what it might have been like to be besieged.

The politics of exclusion mean that maintaining the boundary between who is allowed in and who is forced to remain outside creates a distancing between those inhabiting the areas *within* and *without* the walls. London's old City parishes were even named in this way, so that St. Botolph *without* Aldgate was the name for a parochial area located outside the old city gate. Aldgate, situated within the ward of Portsoken, was traditionally where aliens were permitted to dwell in London. To be outside the city walls in days gone by meant not only that you were outside of the protection of the physical defences of the city, but that you were excluded from its commercial organisations.

Yet forms and norms of exclusion are not only the practices of the majority against the minority but also the practices of the minority against the majority, as the case of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem demonstrates. Its Haredi Jewish inhabitants have put up notices controlling the modes of dress of women moving along their streets. They ask "women and girls who pass through our neighbourhood... [do] not pass... in immodest clothes",

using their self-determined boundary for surveillance and determination of behaviour by their own norms, despite the fact that on the face of it the streets in question are thoroughfares as open as anywhere else in the city.

Just as being forced to live within the Venice Ghetto walls paradoxically enforced separation, but also fostered a blooming of Jewish culture, to be forced to live outside of the walls can become a matter of choice. So immigrants finding their way to the east end of London—seen as a place of refuge for three centuries—have used their apparent position of vulnerability to build networks of self-support a short distance from the heart of the city.

Although city walls are relatively rare in modern cities, there is a growing increase in gated areas that form islands of privilege within the heart of the city, forming spatially isolated areas apart from the throng around them. The interruption to the city grid also creates barriers to movement so to get from one street to the next, a person has to make a circuitous route around the privatised





The Venice Ghetto.

Photography: Dr Kayvan Karimi.

“After all, streets are not purely benign devices connecting one place to another.”

space. This is strikingly different from, say, the traditional London square, which traditionally has allowed the rich merchant to step away from the teeming thoroughfares to the quiet solitude of the square, still maintaining access through the surrounding streets. Charles Booth's late 19th Century poverty maps illustrate this well: Tavistock and Gordon Squares were situated just a few turnings away from University College London and would have been the preserve of the rich. However, they did not inherently displace the poor in the same way that gated 'communities' do today, given that the streets could be roamed freely. After all, streets are not purely benign devices connecting one place to another. Indeed, as scholars of space syntax will be aware, they can range from being highly integrated roadways to segregated back alleyways and all the range in between.

Living outside the city walls can create a place apart. What has transpired

in many cases is that the areas of poverty, the squalid courts and dark alleyways on the city edges, can become a fertile breeding ground for new forms of organisation to take shape—whether it is the labour movements that formed in late 19th Century London, or the more radical movements of socialists and anarchists that also sprung up at the time, many organised by political refugees from Russia. It is not merely a matter of poverty that allowed for dissent, rather, being situated in a place apart from the mainstream of city life can create a sense of being away from mainstream society, whether a physical wall is in place, or there is simply a wall in the mind. ♦

Image: Public Domain, British Library's collections, 2013.



London Bridge before the alteration of 1758. Image taken from page 523 of 'Chronicles of London Bridge: by an Antiquary [i.e. Richard Thomson].'



# Hiroshima Mon Amour

A DISCUSSION ON THE SPACE OF TOUCH

Words by Phuong-Tram Nguyen



KISS ME QUICK!

110214

When asked to make a documentary about the August 1945 bombing of Hiroshima, French film director Alain Resnais believed that the element to film was actually the impossibility to film it. He thought that to really show what happened would result in making the horror disappear. Instead, he decided to suggest the horror on screen. In an interview, Resnais expressed that his aim with the movie was to stimulate the imagination of the spectator through different tactics. His resulting film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, is a love story between a French actress and a Japanese man, about their impossibility to be together and the fear of forgetting the past. The lovers don't have names, simply "She" and "Him". Defiance in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* resides in the strategy of mediation between the real and the realm of ideas, and in bringing forth the necessity of touch as a source of knowledge in a dominant visual medium.

By using an allegorical love affair to talk about the impossibility of really expressing Hiroshima's horror, Resnais created a space between fiction and reality. In a café "She" slowly reveals a former impossible love with a German soldier during the French Occupation. Hiroshima and their fortuitous love encounter awaken and resonated with her deep memories from her lost lover in Nevers, in 1944. Through the night, "She" and "Him" desperately attempt to reach for each other in a vain endeavour. The two protagonists are wavering between, both, the desire to be together and the impossibility of being together. The lovers are inhabited by a strong fear of oblivion, and at the end the viewer is left suspended, without knowing if "She" will stay in Hiroshima or not. With flashbacks from archival images of Hiroshima and from "Her" past, the different stories are superimposed without touching. The weaving of the different narratives by Resnais creates thresholds to access each of them, but also allow for the viewer to participate. The fictional space between the stories echoes the space between the viewer and the movie.

Conjointly, Resnais reminded us that the various narratives are only accessible through the sense of touch. In the opening scene of the movie we can distinguish two bodies intertwined and covered with maybe ashes, dew, stardust, sweat. In the interlacing of the limbs, it is impossible to ascertain which ones belong to whom, nor whom is caressing whom. The slippage between the boundaries of the bodies is also a slippage between the manifold narratives of the movie. Touch here, is a way of accessing the memory: the repressed past of the female protagonist or of Hiroshima. Moreover, during a nocturnal chase in the city, the act of reaching for each other appeals to the haptic, which refers in this story to the aspiration to come in contact with the other and the desire to get a hold on the meaning of history. The ubiquitous fear of forgetting strengthens the desire to preserve memory and grasp understanding, but a space between the lovers is always kept. At the end, the only thing remaining are two names, not their name but places in their memory, Hiroshima and Nevers.

Within the space between the various narratives, Resnais elaborated a network of relationships that could evoke an event, whose horror has no equivalent in language nor in the visual realm. By challenging the visible in recalling the sense of touch, he sets the viewer in motion and therefore embodies the act of reaching. This movement of the reach is primordial for the lovers as well as for the maker to seize how the invisible touches us. Anne Carson, a poet and essayist, describes beautifully the act of reaching, in her book *Eros the Bittersweet*. She defines it as a fundamental act in the lover's mind and most importantly as an act of the imagination. But she also warns us that "a space must be maintained or desire ends." With *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Resnais demonstrated a tactic to relate to the invisible visual medium while also reminding us of the importance of preserving a space that will allow the imaginary to be re-enacted. ♦





All images: Aki Inomata, *Why Not Hand Over a 'Shelter' to Hermit Crabs?*

# Sensitivity and Mechanism

SYMMETRICAL SEMIOTICS  
OF FASHION AND ARCHITECTURE

Words by Marianne Kodaira-Matthews

One of Peter Sloterdijk's most prominent propositions is that all ideological structures—including but not exclusive to nation-states and institutionalised religions and science—serve humanity as a communal metaphor for a return to the maternal womb for the 'infantilised mass populations'. He argues that all tangible and thought constructs operate within a larger choreography to reconcile internal and external stimuli within a single spatial narrative.

A qualitative and simultaneous inquiry into the structural utterances of fashion and architecture through a semiotic trajectory allows for a powerful rethinking of spatial organisation and physical representation. In his volume *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*, John Potvin writes that fashion and architectural zones share identical roles within civilisation as a salient enforcement of the creative duality of determinate functionality and artistic empathy; to produce spatial, territorial and conceptual boundaries to satisfy

pragmatic needs, but also their role to create and represent shelter, safety and comfort.

Certainly within high fashion, the medium has always lent itself to a palpable desire for a chimeric re-entry to a 'womb' dimension and nostalgia for an idealised youth—perhaps a recently rendered pastoral Golden Age before social media and its virtual simulacra. Within the retail sector of luxury fashion, a strategic manipulation of the aesthetic of a store to reflect its sentimental genesis and insignia is materialising with the use of specialist 'starchitects', to reimagine spatial intimacy as a localised incubator for brand DNA and heritage.

In the world of wearable chattel, Jean-Paul Gaultier broke the sartorial Internet upon his declaration after his Spring/Summer 2015 collection that he would permanently leave the arena of ready-to-wear after a dedicated 38 years, to instead focus entirely on his couture line. Considered a heralding moment in the industry, Gaultier's move indicates

a return to holistic and integral design, lucidly echoing the visceral and enigmatic, and of course—from an economic standpoint—to reinstate the power of exclusivity—itself an insular construct.

Yet as the fashion world digs its Manohlos into a stylised past, such stoicism is met interestingly by developments within architecture to create buildings which are increasingly flexible, fluid and responsive to the environment, and in the case of the *Prada Transformer*, even peripatetic. A conceptual descendant of Zaha Hadid's Chanel Mobile Art Pavilion as a similarly amorphous example of both architecture and fashion within a single project, the Transformer is the overachieving brainchild of Miuccia Prada and Rem Koolhaas, incarnated as a shapeshifting, polymath house of art. Currently dormant in Seoul, the 160-tonne steel tetrahedron can be reassembled within the space of an hour to host runway shows, film festivals and exhibitions. Interesting parallels have been made to its evocation of prehistoric man's use of crudely stitched animal skins in both





clothing and tents—a marked lack of distinction between that which clothed the individual and that which clothed the community.

While the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and the arts may struggle for such gestures of reciprocal admiration, fashion has long flexed knowledge of a thoughtful likeness with architectural tenets. While fashion trends rarely find themselves topics of the ivory tower discourse enjoyed by architecture, Leila W. Kinney credits fashion as a ‘silent partner’ in Modernism’s “utopian aesthetics and ambitious social engineering.” If architecture was Modernism in full bloom, then fashion is its potent and diasporic seeds.

Even from a purely visual alignment, architecture has always held a privileged prominence, or an acknowledged co-existence in the forum of fashion: Japanese Minimalists are renowned for introspective asymmetry informed by Zen principles, and the aesthetic of Rick Owens reflects an affinity for Brutalist structures in his moodily muscular designs that wouldn’t look out of place on the Death Star. In the more referentially explicit, Prada’s perceptive Fall 2014 collection showcased the luxurious geometry of Art Deco during the Weimar era, and Lagerfeld’s Chanel couture presentation for the same season cited concrete and building textiles as its central muse. “Le Corbusier goes to Versailles!” he declared. Chanel’s Emirati resort show later in the year, featured embellished leitmotifs of Dubai’s futuristic skyline and the ominous silhouette of the Burj Khalifa—which in its own sequential aptitude brought to my attention Aki Inomata’s pensive project, *Why Not Hand Over a “Shelter” to Hermit Crabs?*

Accommodating the unique dimensions of every crab participant, Inomata created custom shells utilizing CT scan technology and 3D printers after her original offerings of generic spherical options were unceremoniously rejected. Observing the transfer of land between the French embassy in Japan and the local government, she explains her inspiration deriving from a likeness in the process with the way hermits exchange their exoskeletons. Each translucent shell was also

molded to resemble a global cityscape or metropolis.

Thus not only qualifying the artist for the prestigious claim of creating the world’s first hermit haute couture, but also for the unlikely revelation via decapod crustacean of the fragile politics of space, and the need to consider the space contained within the form as well as its relationship to the user. Inomata charmingly captures a vision of an unshakably emotional and ethnologic component in how we ‘punctuate’ emptiness. As examined in Sloterdijk’s

“A successful architectural or sartorial structure disturbs, transcends and reconciles humanity; it provides us with the coordinates for a unified identity”

Spheres trilogy, this reflexive need of being to manifest externally defined spaces is really an attempt to achieve total self-realisation through existing in and with something—and oftentimes, desperately anything. The ego’s potent exaggeration of fragments despite facing an inescapable plurality is peacocked in the deliberate methods in our dress and spatial adornments to ‘stand out’ and fortify the contrast between ourselves and others.

But under Sloterdijk’s gaze, fashion at its core is a fluid architecture on and within the individual and a microcosmic

entity in and of a collective architectural ecosystem—which itself is a concentrated abbreviation of a global and grander totality. Adding the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll’s premise that each species on the planet exists in its own ‘Umwelt’, a self-centered world or subjective environment unique to their sensory and psychological capabilities (he makes a fantastic example out of a tick), reveals the crucially isolated semiotics of human artifice. Von Uexküll’s theory—later integral to the arguments of philosopher Martin Heidegger—indicates the instinctual logic of a hermit crab shell-selection process, based simply on which will be most conducive to the avoidance of death. It reveals our expressions of fashion and architecture as spatial containers meaningful only in the provincial human ‘Umwelt’.

While hermits have been known to parade their own stylistic flourishes in decorating their shells with sea anemones, human creations and ornament in any emotive capacity exist exclusively in an anthropological echo-chamber—as only one language out of an infinite number, expressing our primeval and existential need for ontologically significant ‘shelters.’ Because of, and not despite, their inherent semiotic limitations, the structures of the human ‘Umwelt’ are our magnificently sentient and communal embrace against the anxiety of the inhuman.

As social arts defined by their duties and responsibilities to a wider society, fashion and architectural endeavors require sufficient cognisance to surpass merely functional intent. Our structural utterances should combine the material with the invisibly and esoterically ‘human’ to serve as a crucial bridge—or a womb of the interim—between ontic biology and asceticism. A successful architectural or sartorial structure disturbs, transcends and reconciles humanity and, in doing so, provides us with the coordinates for a unified identity, evoking a future more romantic than the past. The shared installed aim, or Promethean gift, of the designer and architect to civilisation is ultimately to remind us what we are and to prepare us for the unknown. ♦





# Self-sufficient Olympics



DEFYING THE STATUS QUO

Words by Stefan Cristian Popa

Elton, L. and Moshus, P. (1995) 'Norwegian Olympic Design', Norsk Form and Messel Forlag, Oslo. Photography: Jim Bengtson on behalf of LOOC.

Ski-jumping defies gravity. Specialists posit that ski-jumping is about two opposing objectives: on the ramp, speed is key; the body must be like a *dart* that glides down the hill. While in flight, however, the body has to be used as a *sail* catching as much air as possible to stay aloft and fight gravity. Interestingly, the act of defiance follows the exact same pattern: a violent start marked by a moment of negation, and then a constant, subtle but firm opposition to the constrained forces. The apparently effortless displacement through air of the ski-jumping athlete shows that in some cases defiance is about control. In ski-jumping, the landing, the place of contact with the earth is crucial. A wrong move, and the whole poetics expressed in flight, crumbles in a desperate attempt to avoid injury.

It is the relation to the land that defined the character of defiance of the Winter Olympic Games organised in Norway in 1994, an event that marked

a turning-point in the history of this competition. The status quo of the Olympics is constituted by the preference for landmark buildings, which was firmly but passively opposed in the small Norwegian town of Lillehammer. The local organisation committee and the architects of the event defied the whole world by holding true to their attitude of respect to the land. It was on this occasion that the International Olympic Committee introduced for the first time the document titled 'Agenda21'—the green agenda of the international organisation committee—but it was truly something else that configured the character of this edition of the games, namely the Norwegian trait for *self-sufficiency*.

In his 1997 essay, *The poetic vision of Sverre Fehn*, architect Christian Norberg-Schulz comments on the notion of 'self-sufficiency' as belonging to the Norwegian identity. He argues that many

of Sverre Fehn's projects won competitions but were not built because of the opposition of the Norwegians towards modern projects. This particular attitude stemmed from the concept of self-sufficiency of the farmer living under extreme conditions in his isolated settlement. Norberg-Schulz links this idea to architectural culture by acknowledging that the farmer was also the architect of the essential objects that surrounded him. In this way, the critic subordinates the quest for self-sufficiency of the ancient inhabitant of today's Norway to the local architectural culture, researching it through the successive generations of Norwegian architects.

Not surprisingly, the concept of self-sufficiency can be traced in most of the architecture produced for the 1994 mega-event—from the compact scheme first presented in 1990, where all of the venues were placed together to minimise



Winter Olympic Games, 1994.





Photograph of the window used by the robbers to enter the Museum.

athlete while in the air. True opposition to gravity is flight, and this is what a ski-jumping arena should be about, not the manifestation of excessive construction ingenuity with the sole intention of creating a landmark.

The landing area of the arena offered the ideal setting for the opening ceremony of the event, during which a rather ludicrous incident took place. Taking advantage of the fact that the world's focus was set on the show marking the beginning of the Winter Olympic Games, a few miles away, a gang of organised thieves employed the most traditional scheme to illegally obtain possession of the jewel of the National Art Museum in Oslo. Edvard Munch's work *The Scream* (1983) was extracted from the museum in less than 50 seconds, using a ladder to climb to one of the institution's windows and breaking it using a hammer. The work of art was recovered three months later in a plot that would make James Bond seem like a child playing with a matchbox. Unarmed agents pushed international law to its limits, using false identities to track down the painting. On the verge of being unmasked by unfortunate local police intervention, they managed to set an ingenious trap to finally return the uninsured painting back to the museum.

A parallel can be drawn between the pure design principle of the *Lysgardbakkene* ski jump and the banality of the method employed by the thieves to enter the secured perimeter of the museum. Both examples illustrate that in order to formalise, in one case a positive, in the other a negative act of defiance, the simplest methods and techniques are the most efficient ones. The 1994 Olympics show that defiance is not an act of flamboyant expression of the possibilities that appear at a certain moment, but a constant quest for identity, pushing the intellectual resources to their limits, regardless of the obstacles and using the tools that are most at hand. ♦

Photography: Stefan Cristian Popa.

Photography: Dag Fonbæk, VG Magazine, No.43, 13 February 1994.



Photograph taken the day after *The Scream* was stolen from the National Art Museum in Oslo, with the ladder still in place.

“True opposition to gravity is flight, and this is what a ski-jumping arena should be about...”

the intervention on the landscape, to the destruction of part of the Olympic village after the event.

One of the most representative buildings of this edition of the Winter Olympic Games, the *Lysgardbakkene* ski jumping arena by ØKAW, mimics the lines of the hill on which it was built. Unlike many of their predecessors, the architects have avoided expressing the element in height, thus redefining the norm. They defied the notion that the most visible things, the most attractive and profitable approaches, are those that stand out. The building by the Oslo-based practice represents the minimal possible intervention on the land. They understood the beauty of ski-jumping; they realised that if the objective of the design is to defy gravity through a complex structural solution, what will actually be achieved is a diminished protagonist value of the





Photography: Stefan Cristian Popa

# The Library

Lysgårdsbakkene Ski-jumping Arena, Lillehammer, ØKAW AS arkitekter mna.



# Architectural Writing



Photography: David Cross, Unité de Marseilles in Marseilles, Le Corbusier, 2013.

## at a Transversal Moment

Words by Stylianos Giamarellos

On the occasion of the upcoming publication of her new book, Jane Rendell discusses how psychoanalysis, art, feminism and political activism shaped her peculiar brand of thinking and writing about architecture.



Those who follow Jane Rendell's work can easily discern a pattern in her output: she consistently comes out with a new book every five years. Those who have not only read her books but also worked with her, highlight her capacity to churn out ideas and provide constructive feedback that can move their work forward into unexplored terrain. If this is often the case, it is precisely because Rendell's thinking moves and associates freely, traversing the standard disciplinary boundaries and categorisations. Her latest book *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis: Spaces of Transition*, is no exception. Almost ready to hit the shelves now, the book gave LOBBY the perfect opportunity to meet Rendell and discuss her research, teaching, learning and writing practices. As I write these lines in the aftermath of an intellectually rigorous—and occasionally emotional—encounter, I feel that these initial impressions have also been confirmed through the enthusiasm that underlies Rendell's work.

### So, what is the story behind your upcoming book?

I can trace it all back to 2001 when my partner and I found some photographs in a derelict house in the Green Belt of London, which I later found out was called May Morn. The house's name actually refers to socialism in a certain period of British history involving the

Labour Movement and May Day. So, we found these photographs and I later used them in an exhibition, but I didn't really think much more about the buildings that were in the photographs for another 10 years. You know, it is a bit embarrassing in retrospect. Some of them are definitely architectural 'icons', and as an architectural historian I should have recognised those that were designed by Tecton, for instance. Once I realised that they were all post-war housing estates from the 1960s, it became easier to put the whole thing together. Around the same time, I was reading Owen Hatherley's *Militant Modernism* (2009). The book reminded me of Russian Constructivism, which I had been interested in as a student, and the Narkomfin project—a communal house that was not fully-fledged, but transitional. At the same time, I was also doing work on the psychoanalytic setting as a transitional space, because it is located between the analyst (with his or her suggestions) and the analysand (with his or her speech and free associations). So, I tried to draw a parallel between these two types of transitional space, thinking about transitional space as a space of change, so also linking it to the transition town movement. At the time I started writing the book, there was a big debate around peak oil and the need to find a transition to a low or even no-carbon economy. So, I was thinking about transition psychologically, politically and socially. The book finishes with the current housing crisis. That's

where the book ends, and that's probably what I am going to develop in future work, which is about to begin.

### Was this the first time you were tackling this sort of issues, though?

I guess we could go back even earlier than 2001, because as I went on writing the book, I started to realise that I'd been interested in transitional space in many different ways from the very beginning of my academic career—and possibly also when I was working as an architect in social housing. As a BArch student I was looking at threshold spaces; in fact, my dissertation was called "The Pyramid and the Labyrinth". It was a gendered analysis of architectural space contrasting patriarchal pyramids with labyrinthine spaces. It wasn't essentialist, mind you—it looked at architectural design with feminine values in relation to social ideas about care. I ended up suggesting that Aldo van Eyck's and Herman Hertzberger's work on threshold spaces offered a spatial model between the pyramid and the labyrinth. I suppose all the interdisciplinary work that I've done since concerns threshold spaces and transition—you could argue that social life is structured around transitional spaces and those relations you make with others.

### How do you see this new book relating to your earlier work, possibly starting from your *Pursuit of Pleasure* (2002)?

Well, maybe this book is a return to architectural history. *The Pursuit of Pleasure* is an architectural history that is informed by feminist theory. I moved



away from that when I started teaching in an art school. At that time I became more interested in artistic practice and art criticism. And then, through developing my practice of site-writing as a situated form of art criticism, I became more interested in what that critical and spatial modes of practice could do in relation to urban criticism and to architecture. In a way, the new book is taking these processes of site-writing that I've developed in response to art, back into architecture. Having said that, I don't see the art-related work as just an 'excursion'; it has fundamentally changed the way I think about practice, and the way that I write. For me, an encounter with another pedagogic experience or practice or a body of literature from another discipline has evolved the way that I work—and I think that is likely to be the case for many researchers.

**In the meantime, the way that art and architecture relate has also shifted, though.**

That's true. In the early 1990s—well, in London at least—you had FAT and muf as very influential collaborative art-architecture practices. I think you see more of that kind of practice now, maybe also related to this condition of enforced austerity. You see self-initiated projects, younger people no longer necessarily wanting to go on and work for commercial architects, but to set up and direct their own practice, to engage in some kinds of gallery-based work too. I mean, the fact that Assemblage was shortlisted for the Turner Prize is a really interesting indicator of where we might be now.

In my *Art and Architecture* book (2006), I talk about two different disciplines and what forms of practice in between them or at their cross-over points might look like. But I think we are now in a much more transversal moment—it has become quite artificial to separate the artistic from the architectural, one discipline from another.

**What has changed in your approach to architectural history in this decade between your earlier and most recent work, then?**

A couple of things: One would be the really different way I handle theory now. When I was working on *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, which was my PhD thesis, I was



Moss Green/May Morn, 2001.

**“We are now in a much more transversal moment—it has become quite artificial to separate the artistic from the architectural.”**

very passionate about the work of Luce Irigaray. It's still very important, but I'm slightly more reflective about it now. Looking back, I think that the history I am doing in that book is slightly overdetermined by the theory. Irigaray was talking about what I understood as a choreography of the spatial relations between the sexes—the spatialisation of sexual difference, the choreography of the gendered body in spaces in early 19th Century London. Her conceptualisations of women as circulating commodities also offered me ways of thinking about whether women were themselves commodities, or the buyers

and sellers of commodities in early 19th Century London, and also the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. On the one hand, there was a patriarchal urge wishing for middle-class women to stay in the house—to be good wives and mothers—but the capitalist drive wanted them to be consumers. And of course there is the class issue, with working-class women present but ignored in the public realm, and middle-class women becoming more visible as valuable forms of property—as a form of conspicuous consumption.

With this feminist version of Marx's commodity theory in mind, I entered the archive. The fact that I had read a theoretical text prior to entering the archive was suggestive. The theory suggested to me what I might want to find in the archives; maybe, as a result, I missed things because of what I already thought I knew and was already intending to look for. I don't know, but there is an interesting interplay between the two—between theory and history—to consider. What I don't think I did in the book, looking back now, is to use the historical evidence more to challenge the theory. So, in a way the theory remained quite intact. What I am more interested in now is association and analogy as a method. So, I am interested in laying out a story about transitional spaces in psychoanalysis and laying out a story about transitional spaces in architecture, and then exploring the crossovers and associations between these two strands. I am also looking at

Photography: Jane Rendell.

how that might work on the page with text and images, so I am much more involved in the design of the book than earlier. I love the way the designer—Marit Munzberg—interprets graphically what I am trying to do conceptually.

The other thing that's changed is more unsettling. When I was a student, I was an outspoken feminist. In my first year I was totally opposed to what we were being taught, a bit rebellious and maybe in that sense not a very 'good' student; I couldn't see beyond the feminist politics and what I could learn from the so-called 'male masters' like Le Corbusier. Why should I study a modern male architect? But in this book I decided—because of the photographs I found—that the time had come to return to these very iconic projects by male architects, like the Narkomfin, the Unité and Roehampton. Perhaps my attempt to connect the story of these buildings with my work on psychoanalysis, might help me say something new about these buildings, to see

Well, it's been an 'in-and-out' process really, and I am heading back in again now. I think feminism has changed over this period too. When I was doing my history dissertation for my BArch back in 1988, there were only two or three books on feminism in architecture. So, I was more interested in relevant feminist developments in other disciplines, like anthropology and geography. After that time, I worked in a feminist architectural cooperative. It was an environment that helped me think about women users, discrimination in the building industry and the profession at large. During that phase, feminism was more of a lived experience for me. I picked up the academic thread again when I came back to study for my Masters, and by that time the literature had started to develop; Beatriz Colomina's book on *Sexuality and Space* (1992) had come out, and I also contributed to this developing interdisciplinary discourse through the *Gender Space Architecture* book I co-edited with Iain



Narkomfin Communal House, Moscow, 1928–1929.

them in a different way. And thanks to my training in architectural history, I have also gone back to what other architectural historians have written before me. I have learned an amazing amount from the secondary sources—from Jean-Louis Cohen's, Catherine Cooke's and Nicholas Bullock's relevant studies.

**How did your engagement with feminism develop over the years?**

Borden and Barbara Penner (1999). But it was only during my PhD that I really started to think about what feminism could offer as a critical academic method over other conventional methodologies in architectural history. And that's when I started to think about autobiography and the use of the 'I' voice as a way of challenging those apparently neutral, objective approaches. If I had known at that point

about Donna Haraway's work on situated knowledge, it would have been great, but I think that parallel developments also came out of my own work—the understanding that knowledge is situated has become really key to my work. It comes out of feminism but it is not only important for women.

Sometimes when I have taught feminist texts, I have seen people rolling their eyes, particularly young women feeling pressurised by feminism and not relating to it, while some men responded that this is literature by women for women, so it might not be relevant for them (that is why Alice Jardine's 2009 edited collection *Men in Feminism* is so important for developing an understanding of how feminism is relevant for men as well as women). The more negative episodes in my teaching experiences meant I was ambivalent for a while; I didn't want to force the issue. I think that this kind of work has to come from a shared sense of urgency. I found it difficult to introduce feminism from a neutral perspective after having had a few negative experiences of my own concerning sexual discrimination, but opening people's eyes to this in a positive way, empowering them, teaching them how to be critical, that takes a while to work out. However, my experience from young women over the last few years confirms a flourishing of feminism all over again. It is a very lively scene again today; it's quite inclusive, from liberal to radical perspectives, and from those working in collectives currently, to those writing their own histories of the 1980s. The recent work at the *AJ* concerning discrimination in the profession has also made the issues topical and been extremely invigorating.

**What was the relation between your research and teaching practices over the years?**

When I first got into teaching, I concentrated on materials I was also researching. Devising my first courses got me thinking about pedagogy. After my initial studio-training, I have found the split between studio-based teaching and the seminars of architectural history rather frustrating. So, I have been interested in how you can work across those models, and how you can teach history and theory in a more studio-based



environment through intensive workshop modes. You still need to have a curriculum, but it might not be as predictable as usual; different things might happen according to what might come out of a creative writing workshop, and this can inform research trajectories too. It was actually a student comment on site-writing a few years earlier that got me rethinking about the temporality of site-writing. That's one of the privileges you enjoy in such an interactive teaching environment: shared insights and ideas. In the more activist work I have been doing over the last couple of years, I have become less interested in the ownership of knowledge and more interested in what people can do together. In the academy, though, your research output is usually assessed in terms of sole authorship. However, in urgent problems like housing, much more can be done collectively. I thus tend to oscillate between the two—sole authorship and working with others, and time alone and time shared. I would like to see site-writing, which has mostly been driven by my own voice so far, becoming something more participatory than that.

#### How does political activism feed in to your work?

Back in the 1990s, I was very much into movements like the Cuban Solidarity Campaign and Architects Against Apartheid, and I belonged to the Socialist Workers Party and WAFER (Women Architects for Equal Representation). Maybe it was when I did my PhD and became more immersed in the academic environment and the need to critique academic methods that I felt less of a need to intervene in the so-called 'real world'; or maybe there were not so many pressing issues, or perhaps I didn't feel them. I don't know, but it does really feel at the moment that we are under assault, you know, from so many sides. The climate change crisis is not something I have followed as thoroughly from the beginning as I should have, but having now looked at the literature and the evidence, it is astounding why more things aren't happening in the face of the conclusions reached. I have tried to offer critique on that front in UCL around the BHP Billiton funding, but I don't really like confrontation, you know; I find it unsettling and stressful. Politically, questions must be asked;

emotionally, I like to be more discursive and less combative. Yet there are certain matters where I reach a limit and know I must act, and I am finding ways of working with people who have different limits or different value systems. I am currently negotiating those differences through the Ethics in the Built Environment research project.

The enforced austerity programme as an agenda for dismantling the welfare state is another pressing issue that also touches upon me directly as a leaseholder in a social housing estate. Issues that I have been discussing with colleagues like Ben Campkin and the UCL Urban Lab

**“I have become less interested in the ownership of knowledge and more interested in what people can do together.”**

have suddenly become very, very real in my own life and neighbourhood—for example in the Aylesbury Estate in South London now. I am trying to relate my concerns around fossil fuel funding and the current housing crisis; I am thinking about a project on work/home displacements. What would link the two is ethics; and that is the work I've been doing in order to build a network within UCL around ethics in the built environment research. While our research ethics regulations at UCL have been devised through the model of medicine, I have been thinking about what different ethical models emerge in the humanities, design and participatory research—regarding covert research, for instance, and the vulnerability of the researching as well as the researched subject.

I am reading philosophy to help develop my understanding of ethics—in terms of Foucault and Butler, for instance, about how one relates to another. I am thinking, on the one hand, about displacement in terms of my own home—and the shift in the Bartlett from an academic office-based culture to open-plan working; for peace and quiet, I work more at home now. The institution has managed to outsource or displace one set of costs onto its employees, but also, because of the demolition of social housing estates, how being 'at home' as a site of work as well as leisure is no longer secure. On the other hand, 'at work', in the university, I have been engaged in the movement of funds from one site to another, and in tracing the source of that funding back to the displacement of people from their homes as a result of fossil fuel extraction. Lots to tie together, hopefully I can use my method of site-writing as a way to configure displacements.

I am not saying that you have to have lived through something in order to be galvanised, but perhaps, as is the case with a lot of activism, there is usually some kind of trigger for action to take place. In the past I was a bit wary of the impact assessment of academic work. I agreed that our research should influence life outside the academy, but the ways of measuring this seemed wrong, and quite often impact is constructed around more scientific models such as prototyping and commercial contracts. However, when doing work recently as an academic expert for the Public Inquiry into the Compulsory Purchase Orders on the Aylesbury Estate, I really saw how my research in architectural history could be more directly useful. It got me thinking: what could the work and knowledge produced by our Bachelors, Masters and PhD students do in these concrete situations? And suddenly things feel so much more alive. ♦

Photography: David Cross, 2013.



Westminster City Council, Churchill Gardens by Powell and Moya, London, 1950–1962.



# Sky is the Limit



## ‘STARCHITECTURE’ AS A HINDRANCE TO IMAGINATIVE DESIGN

Words and Photography by Nnamdi Elleh

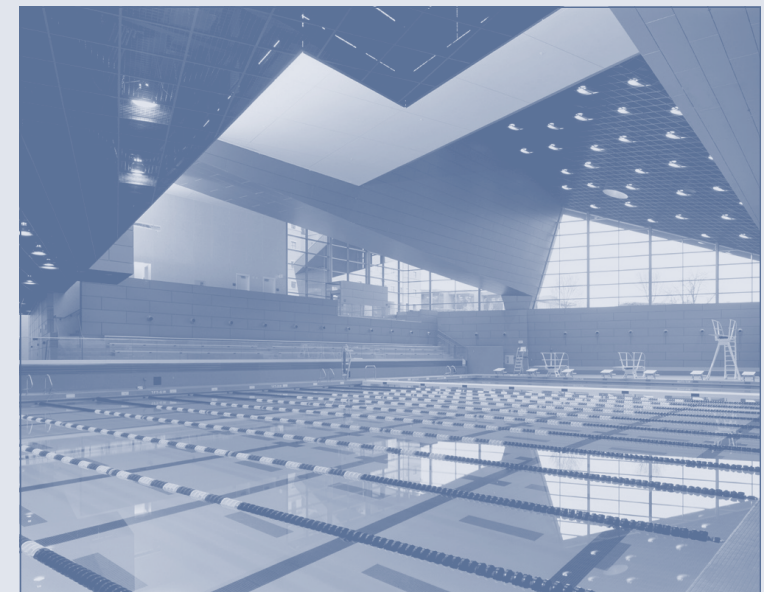
I teach in a campus that has accumulated its fair share of buildings designed by some of the most renowned avant-garde architects, including the likes of Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Michael Graves, Benard Tschumi and Thom Mayne. Doing their best to respect the building codes of structure and safety, these architects nonetheless set themselves apart by working outside the existing norms and setting new trends. Indeed, it is precisely this ‘signature architecture programme’ that has converted a formerly depressed urban campus into an experiential venue, rendering the University of Cincinnati campus an ‘exciting place’ for teaching and research, as well as an ideal destination for a select architectural tour.

However, after reading the contributions of colleagues from Asia, Europe and Latin America, and editing them for a book titled *Reading the Architecture of the Underprivileged Classes* (a project that recently took me to some of the most economically challenged neighbourhoods in a number of African countries), my attention is redrawn down to earth. As I walk through the campus, I consider the huge philosophical and aesthetic contrasts between these signature structures and the architectural production of the underprivileged classes. In doing so, I do not overlook humanitarian design contributions of non-governmental organisations in the aftermath of human-made or natural disasters.

It is stark contrasts like these that challenge us to investigate the meaning of the eye-catching, glossy and well-put-together architecture in our cities. These ubiquitous cynosures, instantly eye-catching and masterfully executed, pose three major dangers to architectural design as a creative art in the tradition of the humanities. They interrogate architectural practice: first, as an environmental and socio-spatial solution; second, as a complete art that ended with the end of modernism; and lastly, as a technical substitute to human experience.

With so many wars, refugee camps and poverty still plaguing the developing parts of the world, the kinds of solutions provided by the ‘starchitects’ are far removed from the experience of many human beings on earth. Hallowed sepulchres—sites of struggles for survival—usually lurk near the emerald centres that host seemingly implanted architectural edifices, almost as islands to themselves. They make me yearn for the metaphorical architectural solutions of the 1960s. These projects managed to stimulate our imaginations, even when groups like Archigram knew that their envisioned cities of tomorrow were not easy to materialise.

By contrast, ‘starchitectural’ production destroys human imagination by creating fantasy worlds within its domains. When we walk into some of these well-built projects, we enter the dream-zone of a ‘Disney World’ where we can see our faces reflected on the glossy floors, our bodies ricocheting in shadows and rays of light reflected all around us. With their interiors shutting us off from the modern world, they



University of Cincinnati Students' Recreational Center  
by Thom Mayne/Morphosis Architects.





Twyfelfontein (Doubtful Fountain) Visitor's Center in Namibia by Nina Maritz Architects.

offer the illusion that the modern project has already reached its closure and the ideal society is already here. These architects' representations thus portray the exact opposite of sociologist Jürgen Habermas's view of the unfinished project of modernity.

When we go even further to examine the nuts and bolts of the tectonic solutions offered by 'starchitects', we acquire the false sense of a complete world in which technology has already achieved all that is possible. This undermines the concept of humanity itself. Architectural production is an art based on its aspiration for perfection—always called to task to improve by the critical set of eyes that see beyond the present. When Piranesi drew from well-known ruins and artefacts in order to depict the crisis of reason and human progress, he was showing us a world beyond the false universe of a market where all aspects of life are sold as a self-sustained world.

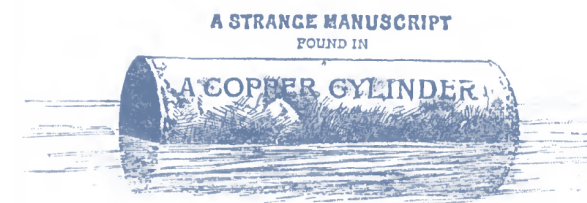
Through its immense power on the viewer, 'starchitecture' subliminally conveys the illusory message that a community can have an architecture of salubrious experience only by spending huge sums of money. Only then can the lustrous facades, interiors, furniture and fixtures of the glamorous buildings be realised. However, the production of the underprivileged classes can help debunk this myth, opening up novel pathways for our architectural imagination. This is already evident in the work of architects who learned from them and adopted their tectonics—ranging from Nina Martiz's Visitors'

Centre for Twyfelfontein World Heritage Rock Art Site in Namibia, to Sean Wall's Container House for New Jerusalem Children's in Johannesburg. These two architects in particular explore diverse techniques for finding materials—what we usually call recycling—in order to make buildings that are humane and environmentally sustainable. I do not know of any 'starchitect' who can reclaim the materials we usually discard and render them artistically and functionally applicable to their building practices. With less resources at their disposal, the underprivileged classes nonetheless manage to produce structural drama and call attention to their work. Their achievements raise questions, stimulate our curiosity and inspire us to consider working to improve the lots of humanity.

In this light, 'starchitecture' limits imagination in design as it pushes towards closure, leaving no room for further investigation of related problems. 'Starchitects' can only posit a world that is complete by means of an illusion. On the other hand, the underprivileged classes 'think outside the box' of the shopping maniac and the endless supply of luxury materials that money can buy. Who is more imaginative, then? The one who has to spend a lot of money in order to have something aesthetically pleasing, or the one who spends little or nothing, and solves architectural problems that meet human needs? Apparently, the verdict is already out. ♦

# The Power of Capitulation

A VICTORIAN SCI-FI PORTRAIT  
OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL DISSENT



Words by William McMahon

Architecture magazines are brimming with projects that boast of tearing up the rulebook, whilst harking back to the idolised radicals—from Nieuwenhuys and Matta-Clark, to Superstudio and Archigram. How can architecture be in a real state of constant revolution, when its practitioners are situated in an environment that renders dissent impossible though? A world embracing change, like the one we are reportedly in, sets up an inescapable paradox: how do you oppose a system that embraces your opposition? If your idea is comprehensible, it cannot be in opposition; if it is incomprehensible, it will be ineffectual. Trying to sidestep this paradox requires us to consider

what it is to oppose a system. Like a quack prescribing a panacea, I propose to do this by entreating you to read a wonderful book: *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, written by James De Mille in the middle of the 19th Century.

Four languid Englishmen, bobbing about on a yacht in the middle of the Atlantic, find the eponymous manuscript floating in the water. It is supposedly the report of a sailor, Adam More, who was lost in the Southern Ocean during a storm, and was carried past the (recently discovered) mountain ranges of Antarctica, to a tropical paradise beyond. Knowing that the Earth's radius is less at the poles than at the equator and that its core is hot, some of De Mille's contemporaries had come to the plausible conclusion that the South Pole must be heated by the Earth's core. But stranger than this Victorian science fiction are

the people who inhabit this land. They call themselves the Kosekin, and "their ruling passion is the hatred of self." This makes them "eager to confer benefits on others." Wealth and luxury are therefore marks of low status—showing that people have not avoided having benefits conferred upon them. The ultimate manifestation of Kosekin ideology is that, to them, "death is the highest blessing." The importance of death means people seek honourable ways to die. To be ritually sacrificed is a great honour. To then confer the benefit of your flesh on others, even more so.

However, upon his arrival to this land, the Englishman Adam meets a woman, Almah. Just like him, she is not a Kosekin and therefore prefers life to death. This being a Victorian novel, they are utterly in love within a sentence of meeting. The Kosekin rejoice, as this instigates



“Today, for architects to have a voice, they must be part of the system, even if that limits the scope of their defiance.”

their equivalent to marriage—a separation ritual. Such is the public prominence of these two, seemingly insane, souls, that it is soon decided to give the pair even greater blessings. They will be sacrificed and cannibalised.

Of course, Adam objects profusely and begs the Kosekin to spare his and Almah’s lives, but the Kosekin “would not—in fact could not—obey a command that would be shocking to their natures.” Adam faces the same problem as today’s architectural dissidents: if they are, in fact, defying the existing culture, the rest of us won’t be able to countenance their ideas. For the architectural avant-garde, this makes life frustrating. For Adam it will make life brief.

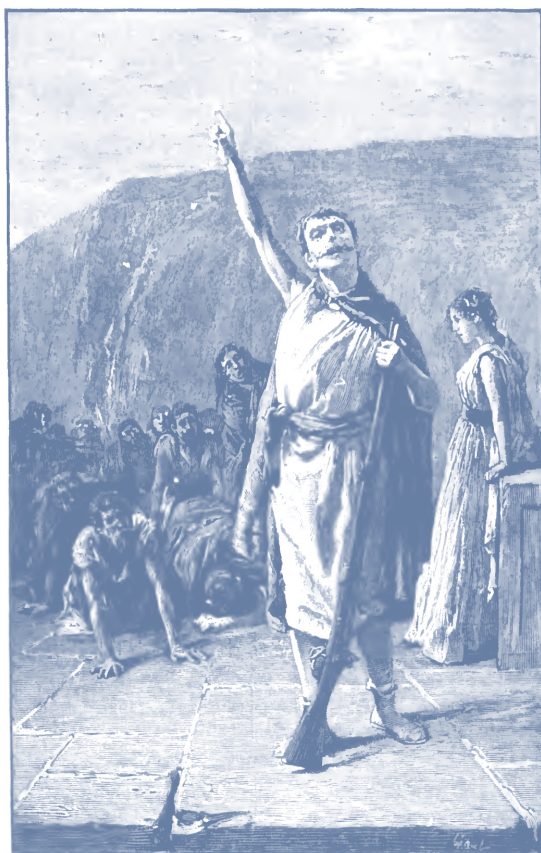
The fateful day draws near. In a twist of fate, Adam is sharing a cell with the exalted chief pauper, who—with his counterpart, the “chief hag”—carries out all sacrifices. His gleeful anticipation of the executions only increases Adam’s futile efforts to avoid them. Adam’s defiance is incomprehensible, so on the appointed day, he is marched with guard of honour, to the public sacrificial altar. Here, watched by crowds of thousands, Adam again defies the death-dealing system. He refuses to lie down upon the altar. The executioner, unable to understand, assumes he must wish that Almah be given priority. So, the chief hag raises her knife to give Almah the blessing of

death, but Adam writes, “a thrill of fury rushed through all my being, rousing me from my stupor, impelling me to action... my rifle was at my shoulder; my aim was deadly. The report rang out like thunder... The nightmare hag lay dead at the foot of the altar.” The Kosekin have never seen a rifle before, and it inspires total awe. The chief pauper, in the confusion, tries to thank Adam by swiftly killing him, but again, Adam’s hatred of death leads him to kill. He, the lowliest in the land, has killed the two most respected members of Kosekin society.

He braces himself for a backlash that never comes. What he thought was an attack on the regime was, to the Kosekin, an extension of it. He has dealt dramatic death at the altar. He thought he was setting himself apart from Kosekin society, but really he embedded himself within it,

and it within himself. He has achieved what he wanted: he and his lover are alive, and his new status as some murderous deity means they will remain so. But he gave up his antagonistic position in order to enact change and in doing so carved out a place as their benevolent ruler, granting them death and poverty. He no longer defies the system, but finds a place within it.

So it is for the architects of today. In order to have a voice, they must be part of the system, even if that limits the scope of their defiance. Whether meaningful change is possible with such a methodology remains to be seen. Is there a better methodology? Defiance—if it is possible—is not refusing to capitulate, but rather finding good sorts of capitulation. If that is the case, then this call to arms can only really be a call to disarm. ♦



“I AM ATAM-OR, THE MAN OF LIGHT.”



“THEN THE KOHEN RAISED HIS KNIFE AND PLUNGED IT INTO THE HEART OF THE YOUTH.”

Original illustrations for James De Mill's *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* by Gilbert Gaul, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1888.





Words by Eray Çaylı  
Illustrations by Samra Avdagic

# Defiance *in*

TOWARDS A HISTORICALLY GROUNDED  
AND SPATIALLY SITUATED NOTION

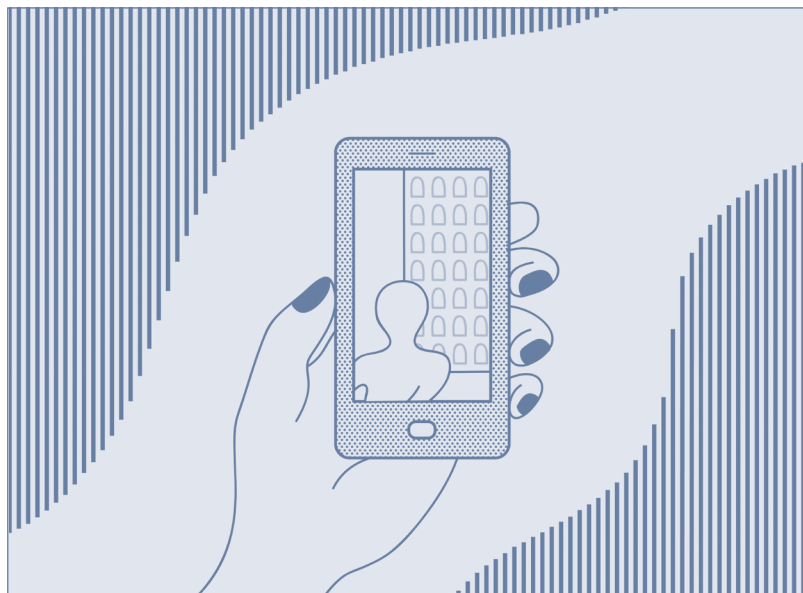
Etymologically, defiance is rooted in *fides*, the Latin term for 'faith'. It could therefore be additionally understood as an antonym of *confidence*—more precisely, of *confiding in* someone. When we *confide in* someone, we entrust something to them under certain conditions. If these conditions are breached, we are entitled to take it back. In this act of taking back, defying is not outright enmity but the revocation of a social contract based on trust; it is defying *in* rather than defying *of*.

Consider the current global crises regarding the 'publicness' of spaces and resources. Much of the reaction they have sparked is by definition spatially situated; it is not just defiance *of*—state authorities, police, parliamentary politics, the financial sector—but defiance *in*—town squares, spatial centres of economic and/or political power. Defiance *in* is also grounded historically, involving actors that share a long-established social contract. It is defiance-as-the-revoking-of-confidence-in the actors to whom that which is public has hitherto been entrusted. In my teaching and research throughout the past four years, I (and others involved) turned out to probe the spatial boundaries of that which is public. Below I present three vignettes from this experience that reinforce my understanding of defiance in the aforementioned terms.

## August 2012 Sivas, Turkey

In July 1993, a Sivas hotel was set alight by hundreds of rioters before an inactive police force and live TV cameras. The rioters were protesting against a culture festival held there. With 33 of the accommodated guests dying as a result of that arson attack, those who claim their legacy have since been rallying for the building to be turned into a memorial museum. Having refused to engage with their demands, the state authorities finally expropriated the building in 2011 to turn it into a Science and Culture Centre; a sizeable section of it is now dedicated to the arson. For more than a year now, I've been coming to Sivas to interview the authorities involved in this project and have therefore built a certain rapport with them. I was there this past summer to conduct observations during the institution's working hours, and to find out about the people who use or visit it, as well as the services provided to them. Although initially authorised by the officials, my research comes to an abrupt halt when the Director of the Centre unlawfully confiscates my notes and seeks to expel me from the building. It is telling that the Turkish word for expropriation is *kamula tırma*—literally, to render something public [*kamu*]. His argument is precisely that: "since 2011 this building is public space; therefore, you cannot carry out such research here."





**December 2012**

#### **Royal Festival Hall, London, UK**

My students and I are discussing how several episodes of war, disaster and conflict have shaped the built environment of London. We are doing this inside the Royal Festival Hall, a building constructed only a few years after World War II when Britain had just witnessed severe aerial bombardment of its cities. The solidarity and camaraderie brought about by the war-experience resulted in a series of architectural projects serving the common good—including public housing, hospitals and schools. Aspiring to become the ‘people’s culture centre’, the Royal Festival Hall intended to break with the elitism of concert halls. To illustrate this, I draw my students’ attention to the architects’ decision to do away with a single show front and an imposed choreography towards the auditorium. In addition to that, the building boasts ample space for public use. Just as I’m wrapping up, though, a security guard comes inquiring. “Could you please move away from here?” As it turns out, we are standing within the eyesight of the customers of Skylon, the upscale restaurant located here since the building’s recent privatisation and refurbishment. “They’d rather not see people like you while they’re wining and dining.”

**August 2014**

#### **Zorlu Centre, Istanbul, Turkey**

Zorlu Centre is a luxury residential and retail project designed by the renowned Turkish architect Emre Arolat in 2013. Built on the former premises of

a publicly owned institution, the project is proclaimed to have created new public spaces. Having already interviewed Arolat, I am now at Zorlu for in-situ research. When I try climbing up the semi-vertical garden, mentioned as an example of the new public spaces by the architect, security guards bring me to a halt: “That’s not allowed!” When I take out my camera and start taking photographs, another guard approaches. “I’m an architectural researcher working on Zorlu,” I explain, “and I’m taking photographs of buildings and spaces of architectural interest, such as these piazzas.” “That’s subject to permission,” the guard responds, suggesting that I need to speak with the staff at the information desk first. Upon visiting the desk, however, I am informed that they are not entitled to grant such permission. “You have to email this person” from Zorlu’s PR department, the staff members explain. I confirm that I’ll send the necessary email, while asking about the exact regulations for photography in the Zorlu Centre. “Well, you can’t photograph spaces of public use unless you, and/or the people you’re shopping with, are in the picture.” I thus go back out and continue my documentation in the form of ‘architectural selfies’, meditating on the sort of biopolitics that underpins a public space whose publicness is reduced to snapshots of the bodies passing through it.

While clearly falling short of political protest and activism, the assemblage of these vignettes nonetheless highlights the important defiant potential latent in spatial historical work, and the spatial historicity inherent in the act of defiance. ♦









# PUGIN TRAINS: DECONSTRUCTING THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

A project by PUG & Helen Kearney

Do the buildings, interiors, objects and ceremonies of the Houses of Parliament actively prohibit democracy from functioning? The building was designed when the concept of full franchise was continually rejected by the ruling elite. With ever increasing maintenance and repair bills, it is now time to reconsider our 'Palace' of democracy. All aboard the Pugin Pendolino!

It's 20.34 on a dark drizzly Wednesday evening, as the Pugin Pendolino pulls out of Wigan North Western Station. The sun has long since set, and the rain streaks the windows of the carriages. Here we find Trevor Sheridan, head of the on board cleaning staff, and our iaded fly on the decadent walls of our new locomotive democracy.

"I fucking hate trains" mutters Trevor, staggering sideways, bracing himself against the faux wood panelling of the carriage as the train rumbles towards the depot. "Who puts wood panels on a train" he thinks, "it's like a shit Mexican restaurant".

Trevor doesn't want to work on a train, but he was one of the few who chose to accept the transition from land to rail when the Westminster cleaning contract was renewed. The pay may be lower, but at least he'd get to travel he'd concluded.

You've got to admire the ambition; to put parliament on wheels, sending it off around the nation to split its time between north, south, east, west, Wales, Scotland even Cornwall; but for ladies and gents like Trevor it's been a right upheaval. He knew he wouldn't be sleeping in the hotels and dining in the restaurants of the provincial towns and cities like the MPs, but Trevor is convinced they're deliberately finding the worst b'n'bs in the country to put him up in as a vendetta for the time he spilt a gin and tonic on Theresa May.

Continuing down the narrow corridor he presses the tiny illuminated crest to operate the carriage doors and moves into the 'backbench carriage'. Trevor moves seat to seat, removing the panini wrappers and silver cutlery that have been incredulously shoved between the upholstery. In many ways he's pleased the rabble have sodded off to yet another pub, but there's a part of him that wishes they were here so he could give them a piece of his mind.

Carriages de cluttered, and just in time, the train arrives at the railway depot. As the doors open, Trevor begins tossing the bags of litter out onto the platform for collection by the high-vis cloaked station staff. "Alright Sheriff!" one of them calls through the arched door. Trevor nods a reply; he doesn't know the man greeting him. "Tell Hunt he's a twat!" another voice yelps. He knows he has a reputation amongst station workers; word of his lack of patience

towards the MPs has spread, and to a great deal of approval too. But it's been a long day and Trevor doesn't want to talk to anyone.

Heaving the largest and heaviest bag of rubbish, Trevor calls this the Pickles Sack, out onto the platform the station crew swarm the carriage to restock the buffet Car and drinks trolleys in preparation for the next day. Bottles of champagne clink together as they are hurried down the train for the Carriage of Lords.

The restock takes some time, so Trevor ambles through the train to take up his usual waiting spot in the most comfortable carriage, Upper Class. Relaxing into the front bench, Trevor's gaze drifts to the paintings on the arched ceiling of the carriage and the faces of the bejewelled men sneer back at him. Although firesomely familiar now, the subjects of these portraits are totally alien to Trevor. "These bastards are not my ancestors!"

Avverting his eyes from the slave drivers, workhouse owners and land barons daubed on canvas, Trevor turns his attention to the despatch boxes on the central table. These ornate wooden boxes and their contents are a total mystery to him, but he cleans them daily nonetheless. He remembers the day that a civil servant back in Westminster tried to have him fired for doodling on it, before it was discovered that Gordon Brown was the culprit. He never apologised.

Looking at his watch, Trevor heaves himself from his perch ready to lock up. As he turns to leave,

something catches his eye. The PM has shoved his carefully scripted quips and pre-written off-the-cuff remarks down the back of the seat. Reaching down between the ancient repurposed green leather and heavily varnished wood, Trevor retrieves the note cards, putting them in his overall pocket.

At the huge wooden door that serves as the ceremonial entrance, he fishes the large, overly decorative key job from his pocket before opening the panel by the door. Flicking switches and turning knobs, Trevor shuts off the power and the chandeliers and wall lights fall dark, only the hum of the wine coolers remaining. Stepping from the train and pulling the grand doors shut behind him he reaches into his pocket for his cleaning cloth and the note cards tumble onto the platform. Stooping to collect the note cards, he straightens up, and begins to read:

"I truly believe we're on the brink of something special in our country; we can make Britain a place where a good life is in reach for everyone. Our manifesto is a manifesto for working people. It means giving everyone in our country a chance, so no matter where you're from you have the opportunity to make the most of your life. It means giving the poorest people the chance of training, a job, and hope for the future..."

Trevor puts the cards away. Taking the cloth, he cleans the panel on the timber door where Black Rod bangs on the door with his staff.

"All aboard the gravy train," Trevor mutters, turning and walking out into the rainy night.



# Building a Name

THE CURIOUS CASE OF LONDON'S BUILDINGS



Words by Miranda Critchley  
Photography by Gustav Almestål | LundLund

On the southwest edge of Old Street Roundabout, between Old Street and City Road, ‘White Collar Factory’ is stencilled in big letters on three sides of hoarding. This could be a piece of graffiti, commenting on Old Street and Shoreditch and the development of capitalist London; as it turns out, it’s the name of an office complex designed by AHMM. White Collar Factory is not just a development but also a ‘concept’: it recreates what Derwent —the developers— and AHMM consider the ‘essence’ of industrial buildings: high ceilings, good daylight and natural ventilation in new build offices, and the Old Street White Collar Factory is designed to cope with an occupation density of one person per eight-square metre—at the higher end of the range recorded by the British Council for Offices. The market for new build offices is tough; this may help Derwent gain an edge. But the awkwardness of the name is difficult to shake.

The design aspects of the White Collar Factory concept are reasonable but the name is misjudged. The white collar as a metonym for the office was first used in early 20th Century America, and ‘blue collar’ followed soon after as shorthand for manual labourers, who often worked in blue overalls. The terms have had class connotations since their first use in the late 1910s: in his book, *The Brass Check*, Upton Sinclair—who is often thought to have coined the phrase ‘white-collar’—wrote that office clerks gave union workingmen the most trouble because they were “allowed to wear a white collar” and so regarded themselves as ‘members of the capitalist class.’ The term’s other prominent association is crime: the white-collar criminal often commits financial offences, “typically involving the abuse of his or her professional status or expertise.”

Shoreditch was once a manufacturing district: over the course of the 19th Century, it became the centre of the furniture trade, which by 1900 stretched along Curtain Road to Hoxton Square. Now, the furniture industry has gone and many of the trade’s workshops and warehouses are offices; ‘factory’ in Shoreditch is an aesthetic rather than a place of production. For Derwent and AHMM, it’s economics too—they’re drawing on the aesthetic not only because it’s popular, but also because it’s cheap. Basic interiors and simple servicing mean that building costs are lower than for conventional glass box offices, and the Old Street White Collar Factory is designed to cope with an occupation density of one person per eight-square metre—at the higher end of the range recorded by the British Council for Offices. The market for new build offices is tough; this may help Derwent gain an edge. But the awkwardness of the name is difficult to shake.

London has strange names for its tall buildings: the Gherkin, the Shard, the Cheese Grater, and the Walkie-Talkie. The Shard is the odd one out—its name is an official one, rather than a nickname. According to Edward Jones and Christopher Woodward’s *Guide to the Architecture of London*, ‘the Gherkin’ was thought up by ‘cabbies’. Nicknames may seem irreverent but they often play into architects and developers’ hands: they act to confirm a skyscraper’s status as an ‘iconic’ building and are often taken on in official branding—although unsurprisingly the Canary Wharf Group don’t market One Canada Square as ‘Thatcher’s Cock’. The idea that these

buildings are ‘iconic’ justifies their presence; the 1990s debate about London’s skyline has been won by the high-rises. Architects are at least obliged to work around certain protected views: one sightline in the London View Management Framework is from King Henry VIII’s Mound in Richmond Park—possibly a Bronze Age burial site—to St. Paul’s Cathedral, 10 miles away. Both the Cheese Grater and the Walkie-Talkie owe their forms to the protection of similar sightlines: the shape of the Cheese Grater was designed to preserve views of St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Walkie-Talkie to allow views of St. Margaret’s Church. “It bends to respond to where things are,” Walkie-Talkie architect Rafael Vinoly told the *Financial Times*. Vinoly’s remark evokes a dancer rather than a radio transistor, but the bulk of his design means ‘walkie-talkie’ is far more appropriate than anything elegant.

Officially, in the City of London, there are tight restrictions on names. Canary Wharf allows corporate building names and external neon-lit signs but the City of London Corporation resists both; buildings are named after a company only if it is the owner or the lead occupier. Properly, the Gherkin is 30 St Mary Axe, the Walkie-Talkie is 20 Fenchurch Street and the Cheese Grater is the Leadenhall Building (its address is 122 Leadenhall Street). In 2014, Salesforce—a company that provides Customer Relationship Management software—tried to buy the naming rights to Heron Tower and struck a 15-year deal with Heron International, the building’s owners. The City’s planning and transportation committee delayed

an initial vote on the matter because it proved so controversial—one committee member described the new name as “cheap and tacky”—and eventually the application was rejected. Now there’s a stalemate: the official name is still Heron Tower, but Heron International call it both Salesforce Tower and Heron Tower, presumably in an attempt to please both sides. It’s only an accident that ‘Heron Tower’ is better—not all developers share names with long-legged birds. We can imagine it’s the bird in the name, rather than the Chief Executive’s father, Henry Ronson.

Ultimately, there’s little difference between Salesforce and Heron. Housing estates, on the other hand, were given names with significance. According to a Greater London Council press release, Ernő Goldfinger’s Balfron Tower was named after a town just south of Glasgow to maintain Scottish associations with the Poplar area. Robin Hood Gardens was a ‘building for the socialist dream’, and so it has a name to fit: taking from the rich, giving to the poor. Names often draw on history; at the Barbican, housing blocks were named after historical figures with a local connection. There’s a duke, a duchess and an earl, a master cabinet-maker and a stationer. The City of London provides short biographies for each namesake: “Sir Humphrey Gilbert (1539–1583) explorer, soldier, sailor. Drowned off the Azores following successful expedition to Newfoundland: lived at one time in Redcross Street.” Some are connected to each other and there are hints of other stories: “Christopher Mountjoy... came to London in 1572 and

lived with William Shakespeare on Silver Street whilst making tires. Shakespeare was a court witness to an action brought against Mountjoy by his son-in-law.”

These days naming is tied up with regeneration and area branding. Goldfinger’s Alexander Fleming House was been re-launched as Metro Central Heights in an attempt to shake the building’s bad reputation; housing estates in the process of regeneration have been similar victims of renaming. Woodberry Down in north London has been redeveloped by Berkley, who excelled in coming up with sterile names: the ‘new luxury development’ includes ‘The Park Collection’, ‘Skyline’ and ‘Waters Edge’. Back in Elephant and Castle, Heygate Estate has been demolished and the area renamed Elephant Park. That ‘estate’ has been dropped is not a surprise, although earlier in Highgate New Town the process worked in reverse: In 1972, Peter Tabori—a Hungarian architect who trained under Goldfinger—planned the redevelopment of a row of terraced houses; his design—terraces in concrete blockwork with the upper floors set back—was completed in 1977–1978. Tabori was anxious to ensure that his new houses and flats felt as though they were situated on streets and disliked the idea of the ‘estate’. But now Highgate New Town is known as Whittington Estate, and its properties are ‘highly sought-after’.

Elephant Park could catch on, but often these names fall into oblivion. An attempt to rename Holborn as ‘midtown’ was particularly unsuccessful, and many other names are only picked up by estate agents—Regent’s Quarter, for example,

in between Caledonian Road and York Way. New development names, usually the result of expensive brand consultation, are too often bland and forgettable. How could the new ‘Oval Quarter’ in SW9 compete with neighbouring Myatt’s Field? In 1889, William Minet donated 14.5 acres of land near Camberwell to the newly created London County Council for use as a public park. The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association spent some £10,000 on the park’s design and it was promptly opened on 13 April that year; 50 years later, Miss Susan Minet provided another quarter of an acre: ‘Myatt’s Field’, which denotes both the park and surrounding area, was named in honour of Joseph Myatt, a tenant farmer famous for his rhubarb plants.

An understanding of past naming practices might help—anything with ‘quarter’ in it is bound to fail, because only brand consultants think that London has quarters—but it’s not enough for developers to research local history; ‘The Park Collection’ in the new Woodberry Down wouldn’t be any better if it were named after a local hero. The problem, really, is that names are often appropriate: developers manage to epitomise their own crassness in their choices. If we had more intelligent developments—rather than the regeneration of estates to produce ‘luxury apartments’—then perhaps better names would follow. ♦