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The Urban Invisibles

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Urban Invisibles

a cura di / dossier coordonné par / edited by
Andrea Pavoni & Andrea Mubi Brighenti

Guest artist / artiste présentée / artista ospite
Aristide Antonas

Editoriale / Editorial

Jacob Dreyer
Aspiring to Urban Invisibility

Léopold Lambert
Invisible and scrutinized bodies

Jelena Stojković
For a City to Come. The Material of Takuma Nakahira's Photography

Elisabetta Brighi
Beyond the gaze. The changing architecture of security between seduction and camouflage

Christoph Michels
Sensing the entrepreneurial city

Jérôme Tadié
Night & Invisibility in Jakarta

Caterina Nirta
Segregated Visibilities. On Purity and the Nonsense of Public Toilets

Chrysanthé Constantinou
Waste. The political significance of the city's suppressed other

Esen Gökçe Özdamar
Rooftop Architecture in Istanbul

Alex Wafer
Fire, (In)visibility and the Magic of the State

EDITORIALE

La città è uno spazio di visibilità — luogo di vedute, macchina di spettacolo e apparato di sorveglianza. Da un lato, la città vende le proprie immagini in forma di loghi e atmosfere speciali, attraverso strategie di *branding*, eventi urbani e gigantismo architettonico. Dall'altro, essa è anche spazio di sorveglianza capillare, apparato complesso che incessantemente rende percepibili i propri abitanti per finalità di governo e di marketing. Eppure, un vasto regno di invisibilità solca la città. Tale invisibilità non è solo relativa al punto di vista di osservatori diversi. Piuttosto, è generata socialmente, politicamente e tecnologicamente: l'invisibile è ciò che attraversa e costantemente produce la città senza essere notato e registrato, normalmente negato in una sorta di "inconscio urbano".

Questo numero è dedicato ad esplorare i fenomeni urbani analizzando i repertori di invisibilità nello spazio contemporaneo. Abbiamo utilizzato l'espressione di "invisibili urbani" per indicare fenomeni di questo genere, osservando il retroscena urbano per comprendere come le soglie tra il visibile e l'invisibile siano quotidianamente gestite e rimesse in discussione.

Gli autori di questo numero hanno raccolto tale sfida, sia attraverso elaborazioni teoriche, sia osservando singoli casi specifici che possono però risultare illuminanti rispetto a questioni più generali. È possibile infatti individuare alcuni fili rossi: in primo luogo, c'è una specie di invisibilità "ontologica" delle infrastrutture urbane e dell'economia urbana capitalista. In secondo luogo, i nostri autori concordano sul fatto che il rapporto tra il visibile e l'invisibile è più complesso di un semplice modello binario, poiché ciò che è invisibile può anche essere contemporaneamente iper-visibile. Dato che la visibilità può uccidere, angosciare o benedire, l'invisibilità può costituire una strategia deliberata — strategia di sopravvivenza, o anche di potere. Gli "invisibili urbani" sono dunque spazi contraddittori, percorsi da rapporti di potere che distorcono, così come da eccessi e potenzialità. Essi incarnano tanto lo stigma dei regimi di visibilità quanto i semi della loro sovversione.

Nel pezzo di apertura, Jacob Dreyer offre una

riflessione sulle strategie di invisibilità di fronte alla saturazione prodotta a livello quotidiano dal sistema capitalista: in breve, oggi non restano più spazi dove nascondersi. A questo proposito, la tesi di Dreyer è che cortocircuitare il regime dominante di in/visibilità comporta il superamento della stessa "piattaforma del progetto filosofico occidentale". Allo stesso modo, Léopold Lambert sottolinea la simultaneità dei processi di invisibilizzazione e iper-visibilizzazione che conducono all'esclusione: "ogni risposta che consistesse nel rivelare corpi invisibili o dissimulare organi osservati rimarrebbe comunque dentro la logica imposta da un preciso sguardo".

Come fare, allora, per disinnescare tale logica? Jelena Stojković si rivolge al fotografo giapponese Takuma Nakahira che, dal 1970, ha reagito alla spettacolare saturazione delle immagini nella città contemporanea. La fotografia di Nakahira si tuffa nel quotidiano, nella routine, intesi come un modo per "ribellarsi contro il paesaggio". Un simile sguardo anti-sensazionalista è anche alla base del progetto di Aristide Antonas che presentiamo come *guest artist*. Situato nella Atene della crisi, il progetto di Antonas evoca una "comunità fantasma invisibile" in un ufficio a cielo aperto che mette in scena la decadenza urbana trasformandola in spazio performativo. Le sue immagini ci restituiscono una potenziale strategia per affrontare l'urbano senza reprimere il suo nucleo invisibile.

Anti-sensazionalista in modo nettamente diverso è l'architettura della nuova ambasciata americana a Londra, studiata da Elisabetta Brighi. Questa architettura utilizza il mimetismo, trasformando il paesaggio intero in dispositivo di sicurezza. In questo tipo di architettura contemporanea, dominio e dissuasione, i tradizionali elementi di esercizio del potere, vengono sostituiti da seduzione e inganno. Christoph Michels evidenzia da parte sua che questo destino è condiviso da un'altra architettura archetipica, il museo. Michels analizza il regime particolare di visibilità che i musei contemporanei costruiscono attraverso la nozione di "atmosfera", invisibile, multisensoriale, relazionale e viscerale per definizione.

EDITORIAL

The city is a site of visibility — a place for grand vistas, a spectacle machine and a surveillance apparatus. On the one hand, the city sells itself, its own images, logos and atmospheres competing with other cities through branding strategies, urban events and architectural gigantism. On the other hand, it is a site for capillary surveillance, a complex apparatus that relentlessly makes itself and its inhabitants visible for governance and marketing purposes. Yet, a vast realm of invisibility also infuses the city. Invisibility is not only relative to different observers. Rather, it is generated socially, politically and technologically: the invisible is what constantly traverses and produces the city without being noticed and registered. It is routinely denied into a kind of 'urban unconscious'.

This issue is devoted to explore urban phenomena through a careful inquiry into the repertoires of invisibility in contemporary urban space — what we call 'the urban invisibles'. Our aim is to look closely into the city's backstage, understanding how thresholds between the visible and the invisible are daily managed as well as, sometimes, disrupted. Contributors have taken up this challenge both theoretically and reporting on a variety of single, insightful cases. To begin with, some common threads can be identified. First, the invisibility of the ontological infrastructure of the city and its capitalist mode of functioning are noteworthy. However, our authors also concur that the relationship between the visible and the invisible is more complex than a binary model — for what is invisible may simultaneously be hyper-visible. On its part, visibility can kill, distress or bless. Therefore, invisibility should also be appreciated as a strategy — both a survival strategy, and a strategy of power. As the articles that follow reveal, the urban invisibles are sites of contradictions traversed by distorting power relations, excess and potentialities. They embody the stigma of visibility regimes as well the seeds of their subversion.

In the opening piece, Jacob Dreyer provides a sophisticated reflection on invisibility strategies vis-à-vis the saturation of capital in everyday life. Today, no hiding space is left, so that sliding from one side to the other of the visible/invisible dyad is of no use. Instead, Dreyer argues, short-circuiting the dominant regime of in/visibility may entail challenging 'the very platform of the Western philosophical project'. Similarly, Léopold Lambert emphasises the simultaneity of exclusionary processes of invisibilisation and hyper-visibility in the city. Accordingly, 'a response that would consist in revealing invisible bodies or dissimulating scrutinized bodies would remain within the logic imposed by this gaze.'

How, then, to defuse such a logic? Jelena Stojković turns to the Japanese photographer Takuma Nakahira who, since the 1970s, elaborated a response against the spectacular saturation of images in the contemporary city. Nakahira's photography dissolves itself into the mundane and the routine, precisely as a way to 'rebel against the landscape'. A similarly anti-sensationalist gaze is also at the root of Aristide Antonas' project, which we feature as this issue's guest artist. Set in post-crisis Athens, Antonas' project conjures up an 'invisible ghost community' in an open air office space that stages urban decadence as a performance space. Through his pictures, we gain a sense of the potential of a strategy to address the urban without repressing its invisible core.

A quite different type of anti-sensationalist architecture is the new US embassy in London, studied by Elisabetta Brighi. The architecture of the new embassy deploys camouflage, mobilising the landscape

Segue una serie di articoli che focalizzano l'attenzione sull'invisibilità come dimensione dell'interazione sociale. Nella sua esplorazione etnografica dell'economia notturna a Jakarta, Jérôme Tadié sottolinea come l'invisibilità consenta agli attori di sfocare la dicotomia tra illegale e legale in una zona grigia che permette lo svolgersi di attività lucrative e circuiti monetari sostenuti. Ancora più direttamente politica è la riflessione di Caterina Nirta sulle persone transgender negli spazi urbani, come i bagni pubblici. Per Nirta, le persone transgender dimostrano, con la loro stessa presenza, il "fallimento della traduzione" e aprono "uno spazio di contraddizioni che evidenziano una narrazione di sopravvivenza e di compromesso territoriale".

Soggetti marginali sono più chiaramente quelli al centro dell'articolo di Chrysanthé Constantinou sul riciclaggio invisibile effettuato da migliaia di raccoglitori di rifiuti nella Atene contemporanea. La marginalità sociale di queste persone, dice Constantinou, corrisponde in realtà alla loro centralità economica nell'economia capitalistica contemporanea, dato che "ciò che è invisibile è ciò che tiene insieme gli apparati urbani di accumulazione". A Istanbul, gli insediamenti informali dei *gecekondu* descritti da Gökçe Özdamar formano uno spazio per

la negoziazione di soglie legali. Questi insediamenti sui tetti sono costruiti "in nottata", sfruttando il buio, la rapidità di esecuzione e le lacune della legislazione urbanistica. Tuttavia, con il prevalere di uno sguardo top-down e omogeneizzante nella Turchia di oggi, lo spazio di l'eterogeneità urbana prodotto da queste "case sui tetti" viene inevitabilmente compromesso. Infine, tristemente sappiamo che è spesso quando accade un disastro che l'invisibilità precaria degli insediamenti informali viene bruscamente alla luce. Questo è il caso nel racconto di Alex Wafer di un incendio che ha distrutto un insediamento di baracche nella periferia di Johannesburg, e di cui l'autore è stato testimone. Il tragico incidente del fuoco, riflette Wafer, rende finalmente visibile non solo l'invisibilità quotidiana dell'insediamento informale, ma lo stesso Stato inteso come soggetto politico che intreccia le comunità locali e le loro esigenze.

In passato, abbiamo ripreso da Merleau-Ponty l'idea che l'invisibile sia "ciò che è qui senza essere un oggetto". Le esplorazioni condotte in questo numero, ci sembra, offrono una serie di spunti molto interessanti sulla natura metamorfica del visibile inteso come elemento complesso del sociale all'interno del quale pratiche, strategie e procedure possono operare.

A.P., A.M.B.

as a security device. In this type of contemporary architecture, seduction and deception come to replace dominance and deterrence. According to Christoph Michels, another contemporary building type appears to undergo a similar transformation. It is the case of the museum. Michels analyses the peculiar regime of visibility that contemporary museums construct through the recently popularised notion of atmosphere, accounting for its multi-sensorial, relational and visceral invisibility.

We then host a series of articles which pay attention to invisibility as a dimension of social interaction. In his ethnographic exploration of the night-time economy in Jakarta, Jérôme Tadié stresses how invisibility enables actors to blur the legal/illegal dichotomy into a grey zone that allows lucrative activities to take place and money flowing. Even more political is Caterina Nirta's reflection on transgender individuals in mundane urban spaces such as public toilets. For Nirta, transgender people signal a 'failure of translation' and open up 'a site of contradictions that highlight a narrative of survival and spatial compromise'.

Marginal subjects are those at the centre of Chrysanthé Constantinou's report on invisible recycling carried out by thousands of scrapers and collectors in contemporary Athens. But in fact, Constantinou argues, their social marginality corresponds to an economic centrality in the contemporary capitalist economy, given that 'what is invisible is what holds the urban apparatuses of accumulation together'. In Istanbul, the informal *gecekondu* settlements described by Gökçe Özdamar form a space for negotiating legal thresholds. Rooftops are built literally overnight, exploiting darkness, rapidity and the loopholes of the city planning legislation. But, as the homogeneity of the top-down gaze seems to currently prevail in Turkey, the potential for these 'fugitive rooftops' to foster urban heterogeneity is jeopardized. Finally, it is often when disasters strike that the precarious invisibility of informal settlement comes abruptly into light. This is literally the case in Alex Wafer's account of a fire destroying a shack settlement in the periphery of Johannesburg, which the author has witnessed. What the tragic accident of the fire finally makes visible, Wafer argues, is not only the everyday invisibility of the township, but also the state itself as an agency that interweaves communities and their demands.

We once took from Merleau-Ponty the idea that the invisible is what is here without being an object. The explorations carried out in this issue, it seems to us, offer a number of very interesting insights into such a metamorphic nature of the visible as a complex element of the social, where practices, strategies and procedures operate.

A.P., A.M.B.



Aspiring to Urban Invisibility

Jacob Dreyer

Urban space as we know it is above all a space created by, and for, economic activities. The type of city we call 'modern,' for example New York, London and Shanghai, all typify architectural typologies created for capitalist life-worlds; for example, the skyscraper in New York, or the lane-house community in Shanghai. In the city, vision is concentrated intensely on ways to advance the self, with the commonly acknowledged means of assessment being money itself. It would seem that the self, the individual human, is elevated here as never before. Those without money, or who choose not to spend it in typical ways, are effectively invisible: while at the same time, those who engage in economic activities in a typical way find themselves being only one component of that Leviathan, "the crowd," with their identity paradoxically sublimated in their search for ways to enhance their presence. In fact, effacing the self, or embracing the condition of urban anonymity, is by far the most compelling technique to attain urban invisibility.

The traditional technique to go unseen is that of the avant-garde: avoiding consumption, thus rendering one's identity illegible (without purchasing certain distinctive clothing, it is unclear which 'urban tribe' one is a member of; the important distinction between which bars or nightclubs one prefers, and indeed, which quarter of the city one chooses to live in, are the final determinants of the process of echolocation: this person, visible only as a shadow, whose presence is detected only as a vacuum within the larger economy). One thinks here, for example, of the episode in Proust when the Marquise de Villeparisis is not allowed into the public toilet, assumed to be too common by the guard, who cannot see beyond her simple clothing¹. In the bourgeois economy, it is impossible to believe that even a princess would transcend social codes; the princess without a ballgown is literally invisible as a princess. Subsequently, and primarily in Paris, further experiments along these lines would be made, by Louis Aragon² and Guy Debord³, or in New York by Ralph Ellison⁴, in Shanghai by Sun Ganlu⁵. In fact, it isn't incorrect or an insult to consider these persons invisible; they are

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¹ Princess Villeparisis' very name indicates she is the lord of Paris. The bourgeois is not connected to any land, not even Paris, but a generic "urban," as the word implies. On the other hand, the aristocrat is the personification, or embodiment of the land. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12999/12999-h/12999-h.htm> (accessed June 19, 2014).

² Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris*, Gallimard: Paris, 1998.

³ Guy Debord, *Panegyric* trans. James Brook, Verso: New York and London, 1991.

⁴ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Vintage: New York, 1995.

⁵ *Sun Ganlu Prose Selections* (Chinese), Bai Hua Literature and Art Publishing House: Tianjin, 2011.

invisible in the eyes of the economy, in the eyes of the state. They serve no purpose, and are not even truly part of this world.

There is, however, a distinction between the aristocrat and the revolutionary: for example, Debord, who is not from an economic system that is extinct, but a system of the utopian future. And yet, he also is invisible, for he doesn't access the city in the usual ways (e.g. by consumption and spending money). He doesn't go in a straight line to work: he wanders aimlessly. . . in a way that is customary for those lost aristocrats turned poets of the French

revolution's aftermath⁶. Not confined to a certain time and place, this parameter can describe any person born and trained for a certain way of life, which revolution has rendered meaningless; or, just as much, any person who rejects

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the present world, and lives instead in a world of their own construction; needless to say, having exiled themselves from the present world, they are no longer visible to its occupants.

Being Solid, Melting Into Air

To be outside, "off the grid," is a popular and, paradoxically, visible technique; the industries of the spectacle have already recuperated this option, televising its possibilities in films, advertisements for Jeeps, etc. As to the psyche of the urban bandit, it has been thoroughly marketized and scrutinized in the past 20 years, via the engine that devours and reconfigures youth culture no less than the major metropolitan police forces. There is not much hiding space, to be sure, in the position of the outsider. The most elegant strategy, then, is perhaps that evoked by Genet, of whom one critic said that

At the beginning of his career, [Genet] cultivated his singularity, he was unlike everyone else, living at the margins of the species . . . then came the miracle of the 1950s, when he realized that the opposite was true, that all people are interchangeable, in fact are the same person.⁷

In other words, the phenomenon that Nietzsche termed the eternal recurrence, realized within the self, pacing through the hall of mirrors of the modern. In the crowd, where we see our own features continually replicated, and where we can find nothing but our own self — a self which is no longer truly our possession, but belongs to some common category of world consciousness, realized via capital and the instruments of spectacle — endlessly repeated. By becoming part of a faceless crowd, by sacrificing one's identity as a separate entity and instead serving as a conduit, a node electrified by economic processes, we eliminate the basis of alienation: e.g., the self, platform of the Western philosophical project.

This generic selfhood (or non-selfhood) needn't be frightening. Isn't the generic (in literature: *cliché*; in art, the *ready-made*, in architecture: the *unité d'habitation*) the modern category *par excellence*? Today, we (unsuccessfully) seek to integrate ourselves into generic forms of existence because we crave for the phantom of collective life, which we believe must reside in the common forms, those forms which have permeated everybody's lives. Since 1989, the Left has been stunted: actually, we don't have nostalgia for socialism as an economic system. Historians have made quite clear that it was cruel and inefficient, a knowledge which those

⁶ One thinks of figures such as Chateaubriand, Tocqueville, or Joseph de Maistre, condemned to wandering by the primal separation from their ancestral land of the revolution — not only a political revolution that would prove to be short-lived, but above all, an economic revolution.

⁷ Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography*, Vintage: New York, 1994.

of us who live in post-socialist countries have discovered first-hand. We just miss the illusion of having a common point with the others; since at the moment, it is only too clear that there is no common point with the others, aside from those mediating bridges created by capital: bridges so flimsy that there is no room for substantial interaction, merely grasping and releasing of commodities. Certainly, the common space is not large enough to build a community on . . .

In fact, our common spaces resemble nothing so much as Kojève's description of 'the end of history,' in which, with the surface of the earth having been completely 'urbanized' (which means in spatial terms, that it has been thoroughly economically exploited), humans return to an animal-like condition; poetry becomes like birdsong, love becomes mating⁸. We westerners, people at the end of history, have lost the ability to see anything that doesn't concern our economic existence. The point of the bourgeois mentality, nominally created by "the city," is that it is just created for and by consumption. Humans are divorced from the world by labor, and only consuming the world can remarry us. In this setting, elegance is invisible, since it serves no economic purpose.

In our cities, with their glittering skylines (although we are unsure of what they represent, the primitive craving for light is sufficient to earn our admiration), the population swarms across the crowded metro concourses, pours in human rivulets through office buildings and *plazas* with *prix-fixe* lunch restaurants, the modern subject finds the only possible context. Within this faceless crowd (for a crowd no more has a *face* than the greater metropolis has a *façade*), what the Chinese call 'people mountain people ocean,' there are those who have already blended completely into the landscape, but who are nonetheless broodingly searching for escape routes, the door to another social world. This includes both relics of the past, and also the aristocrats of a utopian, still-unknown future. . .

⁸ 'After the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult frogs. But one cannot then say that all this makes Man happy.' Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1969, at p.159.



Invisible and scrutinized bodies

Léopold Lambert

The following text will attempt to demonstrate that both processes that aim at making bodies either invisible or, on the contrary, hyper-visible operates through the same mechanisms of a productive politics of visibility. The brief of this issue evokes “homeless, illegal workers, gipsy communities, early-morning cleaners, graffiti writers . . . and let’s not forget urban foxes, cave spiders, mice, contagious germs,” as examples of human and non-human bodies incarnating the “urban invisibles” that gives it its title. These bodies are invisible insofar that they constitute what is perceived as absolute otherness. This argument of a social invisibility is the one dramatically described by Ralph Ellison in his *Invisible Man* (1952): the protagonist is an African American man writing his autobiography from the depths of a New York basement, describing his invisibility for the White bodies surrounding him. The novel opens with this paragraph:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids — and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination — indeed, everything and anything except me.¹

The invisibility of bodies “of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids,” is used by Ellison to describe the urban conditions of African American bodies; such an invisibility is however applicable to all bodies hidden in the shadow created by the social organization of the city. Time is also a factor of this invisibility: the population of night workers, which includes cleaning personnel, garbage collectors, dishwashers, truck drivers, newspaper and other goods delivery agents among others, remains unseen to the rest of the population that tends to unconsciously interpret their work as the result of invisible magic. Moreover, in Europe, as well as in North America, this nocturnal invisible population often finds overlaps with the social precariousness of a population formed by more or less recent emigration.

The idea that time superimposes different lives in the city makes us recall another novel, *The City and the City* (2009) by China Miéville.² Its plot describes two cities, *Beszel* and *Ul Qoma*, existing simultaneously on the same space but invisible to each other. Although many people have seen in this superimposition of two essentially different urban spaces, an allegory of Palestine in general, and of Jerusalem in particular, Miéville himself explicitly opposed

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¹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York: Vintage International, 1995, at p.3.

² China Miéville, *The City and the City*, New York: Macmillan, 2009.

this interpretation of his text.³ The invisibility of our societies is not a symmetrical fetish, it is a constructed condition. Palestinian bodies are simultaneously invisible to the Israeli society, and hyper-visible to its militarized components. Here lies the complexity of the politics of visibility and invisibility: contributing against its hegemonic scheme does not merely mean to render visible bodies currently invisible. Often, this revealing operation is effectuated by policing and/or militarized bodies, thus perpetuating the exercise of power on them.

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Reducing invisibility to a minimum is indeed one of the main focuses in the US and Israeli military research at this moment. The respective works of Derek Gregory and Caren Kaplan help us to understand this technological will to military omniscience.⁴

The “right to opacity,” argued by Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant is thus flouted in the most literal manner by the cameras of drones and the ultra-wideband cameras seeing through the walls of these armies.⁵ Against such practice consisting in the revealing of bodies, artist Adam Harvey has created a series of clothing that significantly reduces the temperature signature of a body as well as hair styles and make-up that prevents one face to be recognized as such by surveillance cameras.⁶

Clothing is certainly an important factor of visibility and invisibility. The hoodie or the niqab, for instance, carries this complexity in their surfaces, simultaneously dissimulating bodies and revealing their presence in societies organized, sometimes legally, against such a voluntary invisibility. The French law of October 10, 2010 thus prevents anyone to hide their face in public, in a semi-explicit targeting of Muslim female bodies wearing the niqab. The antagonist reading of the hoodie — especially when worn by Black or Brown bodies — found its paroxysm in the infamous murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford (Florida), on February 26, 2012.

This piece of clothing might even be legally banned in the State of Oklahoma if a bill planning to do so is voted in February 2015.⁷ In an essay entitled “Profiling Surfaces,” Mimi Thi Nguyen examines these sartorial examples, as well as others to argue the following:

Such cover as clothes might provide confounds because it transforms the available surfaces for reading, extending and transforming the body's boundaries into the world, rendering that body both more dangerous and more vulnerable, depending on their movements. But even as fabric extends a fleshy body's

3 “I’m always slightly nervous when people make analogies to things like Palestine because I think there can be a danger of a kind of sympathetic magic: you see two things that are about divided cities and so you think that they must therefore be similar in some way. Whereas, in fact, in a lot of these situations, it seems to me that — and certainly in the question of Palestine — the problem is not one population being unseen, it’s one population being very, very aggressively seen by the armed wing of another population.” Geoff Manaugh, “Unsolving the City: An Interview with China Miéville,” online at bldgblog.blogspot.com (March 1, 2011).

4 For instances, section “Visuality” of Derek Gregory’s blog geographicalimagination.com; Caren Kaplan, “Air Power’s Visual Legacy: Operation Orchard and Aerial Reconnaissance Imagery as Ruses de Guerre,” in *Critical Military Studies*, London: Routledge, 2014.

5 Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, p. 72.

6 See Adam Harvey’s *Stealth Wear* (2013) and *CV Dazzle* (2012), online at ahprojects.com

7 Emily Atkin, “New Bill Would Make Wearing Hoodies a Crime,” online at thinkprogress.org (January 3, 2015).

boundaries into the world, that body also emerges and disappears, materializes as a threat and dissipates into shadow.⁸

Invisibility is thus only one face of the politics of visibility's coin. Both processes of invisibilization and scrutiny of the bodies are taking the latter for target and exercise a power on them. This is easily understandable when we realize that both processes involve a gaze — even when the gaze deliberately does not see — from an entity external to the seen/unseen body. Whether this gaze comes from the transcendence of the law, or the immanence of the norm — both are always involved to some degree — it reads the seen/unseen body through its narrative, that is its own subjectivity.

A response that would consist in revealing invisible bodies or dissimulating scrutinized bodies would thus remain within the logic imposed by this gaze. On the contrary, a powerful response is offered to us through the example of Ukrainian revolutionary women holding mirrors to the riot-gearred policemen facing them.⁹ During this moment, these women's bodies were neither visible, nor invisible for their opponents: like for the mythological Medusa, the gaze was returned to its emitting entity, thus allowing its introspection rather than its violent exercise of power on other bodies.

8 Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Profiling Surfaces," in Léopold Lambert (ed) *The Funambulist Papers, Vol.2*, New York: Punctum Books, forthcoming 2015. Online at thefunambulist.net

9 I am indebted to Ethel Baraona Pohl for bringing back this memory in her lecture "How to Dress up a Police?," Het Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam, November 27, 2014).



For a City to Come

The Material of Takuma Nakahira's Photography

Jelena Stojković

The photographic apparatus is often perceived as an embodiment of a desire to see beyond the limitations of human sight and bring to the view what is invisible to the eye. Photography is bound to invisibility in many ways, supporting a scientific aspiration to conquer the unseen, for instance, but also serving as a means of reinforcing it socially.¹ Photography is also tied to the city, and this relationship is among the longest standing ones that the medium has been having since its inception.² It thus seems that photography, the city and invisibility form a specific triangle, of relevance when addressing the issue of 'urban invisibles'.

The potent nature of such a three-fold connection can be observed in a large body of critical writing and several projects produced by the Japanese photographer Takuma Nakahira at the turn of the 1970s. Nakahira's practice departed from the candid street photography (seen, for example, at the 1966 exhibition *Contemporary Photographers: Towards a Social Landscape* in the US), and sought means to not only document but also induce social and political change. Having a strong theoretical grounding in the specific discourses developing in Japan at that time around the notions such as the image (*eizō*), landscape (*fūkei*) and materiality (*busshitsu*), this practice is still significant to much of the present-day concerns with the potential of visual arts to envisage and produce new forms of urban inhabitation.

In the third volume of the photo magazine *Ken* from January 1971, there is an image by Nakahira showing a processed strip of photographic negative rolled out in a sequence of black, squared pieces of imageless film segments following each other in and out of the frame. It is a part of a numbered Kodak safety film, cropped and enlarged by Nakahira into a fragment of a presumably redundant and useless photographic material emptied of meaning. The image bases on a double monochrome juxtaposition: the over-exposed shots are seen against a transparent background of the negative but also contain in themselves the whiteness of positive prints that their development would reveal.

Such juxtaposition evokes Guy Debord's *Howls for Sade* (1952), a feature film constructed entirely of similarly contrasted black and white screens, largely accompanied by silence. According to Giorgio Agamben, it staged 'the void where there is no image', pointing at how what cannot be said in a discourse, and is unutterable, can nonetheless be shown.³ Given

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1 See for instance: Daston, Lorraine and Galison, Peter (2007) *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books; Smith, Shawn Michelle (2013) *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*. Durham: Duke University Press.

2 Tormey, Jane (2013) *Cities and Photography*. New York: Routledge.

3 Agamben, Giorgio (1995) "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films", in Leighton, Tanya (ed.), *Art and*

that Nakahira accompanies the photograph with a title reading *Language (kotoba)*, the same relationship between text and image, what is 'utterable' and 'showable', or what can be said and made visible, crystallises as its main subject of concern.

On the particular occasion, *Language* appears within a collective photographic feature titled *Manifesto*.⁴ The magazine, edited by a different photographer in each of the three issues of its short existence (1970–1971), continued to an extent the tradition of *Provoke* (1968–1970), a historic publication best known for its treatment and presentation of photographs in an abstracted and monochrome manner, dubbed blurry, grainy and out of focus. The subtitle of *Provoke* read 'provocative materials for thought', and indicated an aspiration of photography to make an impact on reality by provoking language through crude and bold production and exhibition of images.

As Nakahira is considered to be the chief theorist of the *Provoke* group, the tension between text and image highlighted in *Language* comes as no surprise.⁵ It communicates Nakahira's belief that there is not only nothing left to be shown but also nothing left to be said in the historical circumstances following 1968. The uselessness and redundancy of the photographic material stands for the uselessness and redundancy of language from the title, signalling its inability to articulate any meaningful, politically effective artistic practice at the time of incessant domination of the capitalist media culture. As a matter of fact, Nakahira often voiced out his dissatisfaction with a general ossifying tendency of language in his critical writing, understanding photography to be inferior to language but also immune to its overall petrification.⁶

Photography, for Nakahira, should thus aspire to perform a role of invigorating language, bringing forth new ideas and concepts, and infusing different forms of perception. Such an understanding of photography is insinuated in the title of his first collection of photographs, *For a Language to Come* (1970), containing images previously published in various magazines at the turn of the decade. However, unlike *Language*, which in this sense stands apart from Nakahira's main body of work, most of the photographs included in the collection offer nocturnal views of the city, suggesting that photography should not only enable the arrival of different language, but that such language is immanently bound to urban life.

As early as in 1969, Nakahira described the subject of his photographs to be 'a bleached street landscape seen on the surface where nothing happens, only a slice of forever unfolding everyday'.⁷ This description aligned him with a nascent 'theory of landscape' (*fūkeiron*), evolving in the writing of the leftist film critic Masao Matsuda following his participation in the

the Moving Image: A Critical Reader. Translated by Brian Holmes. London: Tate Pub., 2008, pp. 332–333.

⁴ "Manifesto" (1971), *Ken* 3, 97–112. I rely on my own translations of the texts in Japanese for the development of the argument in this article, unless indicated otherwise. I am grateful to Gō Hirasawa for stimulating and making this research possible.

⁵ *Provoke* was founded in 1968 by Takuma Nakahira, Kōji Taki, Yutaka Takanashi and Takahiko Okada, and was joined from the second issue by Daidō Moriyama. Published in three issues only, it was followed by an independent volume *First Abandon the World of Pseudo-Certainty: The Thinking Behind Photography and Language* before the group dismantled in 1970.

⁶ See for example: Nakahira Takuma (1968) *Kotoba wo sasaeru chinmoku* [*The Silence Supporting Language*]. In: Nakahira Takuma (et al.) (2007) *Mitsuzukeru hate ni hi ga: Hiyō shūsei 1965–1977* [*Fire at the Limits of My Perpetual Gazing: Collection of Criticism 1965–1977*]. Tokyo: Oshirisu, p. 89.

⁷ Nakahira Takuma (1969) "Tōjidaitekidearu to wa nankika [What is Contemporaneity?]", in *Mitsuzukeru hate ni hi ga: Hiyō shūsei 1965–1977* [*Fire at the Limits of My Perpetual Gazing: Collection of Criticism 1965–1977*]. Tokyo: Oshirisu, 2007, pp. 60–61.

filming of A.K.A. *Serial Killer* (1969), together with a group of filmmakers including Masao Adachi.⁸ This discourse articulated a concern for the interconnectedness of the state power and the expanded scale of capitalist urbanisation taking place in Japan at the time, and proposed a radically anti-sensationalist approach to arts practice: moving the camera lens *away* from the spectacles of violence favoured by the media (such as the intense student protests simultaneously taking place in the country) and focusing on the quotidian and eventless scenery of urban life. It was elaborated through a series of Matsuda's essays as well as in various round table discussions in 1970 and 1971, taking place among visual artists, filmmakers and photographers, including Nakahira.⁹

In *For a Language to Come* we thus encounter mundane city traffic, the commute, industry and commerce, anonymous underground

corridors and passages, back alleys, construction sites, close-up fragments of buildings and roads, the periphery and the wastelands of the Tokyo Bay. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind that the 'theory of landscape' is primarily disclosing how the state wields its policing even when there is no visible conflict, these images claim such (invisible) practices of spatial organisation as urban planning, sewage construction, and traffic regulation, to be intrinsic to the state's management of the urban environment.¹⁰ They are not disinterested portrayals of the city's everyday fabric but bring to the fore the networks of circulation – highways, roads, and underground – that are fundamental to the transmission and distribution of goods, information, and labour.¹¹

The city, and particularly its generally invisible flip side, becomes the chief component in the elaboration of the theory, and features heavily in both Matsuda's writing and Nakahira's photographs, to an extent that we also come to think that an implied meaning of the 1970 collection could be *For a City to Come*. The 'imageless' character of *Language*, in such a manner, could be read as a proposition that it is the invisible structure of urban environment – hidden from view in the same manner as the blackness of film negative conceals the whiteness of positive print – that disrupts the emergence of new forms of thinking, or acting, and thus causes any form of artistic practice to be either complicit or impossible. Nakahira, however, embraces this impossibility in his work, which becomes a quest for the way forward in the conditions that inescapably render any antagonism inoperative. It is by no coincidence that in *For a Language to Come* Nakahira draws heavily on the tension between deep shadow and bright light (opacity and transparency, or visibility and invisibility), attempting to 'crack' (the

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⁸ For how Nakahira 'predestined' the filming of A.K.A. *Serial Killer* with this text see: Matsuda Masao (1971) "Fūkeiron no kitten [The Base of Landscape Theory]", in *Fūkei no shimetsu [The Extinction of Landscape]*. Tokyo: Koshisha, 2013, p. 307. For a thorough discussion of the 'theory of landscape' see: Furuhashi, Yuriko (2007) "Returning to Actuality: Fūkeiron and the Landscape Film", *Screen*, 48(3), 345–362.

⁹ See for instance "Fūkei wo megutte [On Landscape]" (1970), in *Shashin eizō [Photo Image]* 6, 118–34. As this round table discussion made clear, the theory also evolved counter inadequacy of the word 'situation', prevailing in the discourse previously.

¹⁰ Furuhashi, Yuriko (2013) *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 138–139.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 144.

appearance of) the city open with his camera flash.¹² Such 'cracks' (in the state of things, in the state of places, in the state of norms), as Félix Guattari reminds us, are never passively experienced, and are aimed towards the advent of new social practices, undivided from each other.¹³

Nakahira's interest in the city extends across but also beyond his involvement with both *Provoke* and the 'theory of landscape'.¹⁴ From 1971 (the year in which he dissociated himself from the theory) through to 1973 he published a number of photographs titled 'City' in various magazines, in parallel to a project he called *Botanical Dictionary*, articulated in a collection of essays *Why a Botanical Dictionary* (1973). Formally, the only innovation introduced in this project was the use of colour, as the photographs again show the same type of disjointed and indistinct urbanity, sometimes even repeating previous, monochrome images. Conceptually, the shift in focus from 'landscape' to 'dictionary' was articulated as aiming to produce a series of views of the city that would be purged of all subjectivity of the photographer and would compile its singular elements so as to potentially reveal new connections between them.¹⁵ In this approach Nakahira is substantially led by his interest in the French writer and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet, the chief theorist of the 'new novel'. Robbe-Grillet is best known for an attempt to shift the focus of artistic attention to objects, in both his novels and films, treating the 'surface' appearance of things as the only substance available to contemplation. As Roland Barthes puts it, description for Robbe-Grillet is always 'anthological', and presents the object as if it were in itself a spectacle, demanding our attention regardless of its relation to the dialectic of the story, by simply being *there*.¹⁶

In Nakahira's case, the 'anthological' approach allows his photographs to show their subject matter as impartial slices of reality, not pertaining to a specific subjectivity, expression or symbolic meaning but acting as an archive of the photographic material, awaiting for its referential point 'to come' in the slow unfolding of time. They not only reveal the invisible structures and systems of governmental control imprinted on the urban landscape but aim to deconstruct and reconfigure their perception. The connection between photography, the city, and invisibility in the material of Nakahira's photography thus encapsulates an active process of exchange and interrelation, in which photography not only brings invisibility to the view but also intends to trigger different forms of conceptual thinking through its particular affiliation with language.

The photographic process used in this ambition relies on deliberate exposure to and confrontation with the city, achieved by intense looking through the viewfinder, and aims to 'bring back' the records of this confrontation, attained through the objectifying function of the camera. These records, however, do not simply 'mirror' or replicate the city, visualise or evidence its nature, but function as non-verbal components of its de-structuring. To return to

12 Nakahira Takuma (1970) "Rebellion Against the Landscape: Fire at the Limits of my Perceptual Gazing. . .", in *For a Language to Come*. Translated by Franz Prichard. Tokyo: Oshirisu, 2010, p. 9.

13 Guattari, Félix (1987) "Cracks in the Street", *Flash Art* 135, p. 85.

14 In 1971, Nakahira participated at the Seventh Paris Biennial, producing a body of work entirely focusing on the city under a title "Circulation: Date, Place, Events", which is another project worth noting in this sense. See: Abbe, Dan (2013). "Fragments of 1971 Paris, On View Today in New York", *American Photo Magazine*, at <http://www.americanphotomag.com/photo-gallery/2013/06/fragments-paris-1971-on-view-today-new-york>.

15 Takuma, Nakahira ([1973] 2006) "Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?", in Vartanian, Ivan (et al.), *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers*. New York: Aperture, 2006, p. 130.

16 Barthes, Roland (1965) "Objective Literature: Allain Robbe-Grillet", in Robbe-Grillet, Alain (1965). *Two Novels*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press, p. 12.

Agamben's analysis of Debord's film, the image 'does not disappear in what it makes visible', but shows itself as such, in its particular materiality.¹⁷ Nakahira explores what this materiality might be, but does not prescribe a definitive answer.¹⁸ He rather leaves us with a question as to whether it is only through its material presence that photography can have an impact on the city, functioning as an equal component of the social practices and discursive relations that constitute it.

¹⁷ Agamben, Giorgio (1995), p. 333.

¹⁸ Nakahira Takuma (1971) "Imēji kara no datsuhatsu [Escaping the Image]", in Nakahira Takuma (et al.) (2007), *Mitsuzukeru hate ni hi ga: Hihyō shūsei 1965–1977* [Fire at the Limits of My Perpetual Gazing: Collection of Criticism 1965–1977]. Tokyo: Oshirisu p. 164.



Aristide Antonas, The ghost of the community

The Open Air Office is a flexible, expandable, open urban space where online work can take place in abandoned city spaces of central Athens. It challenges the possibilities of an urban intervention through additions of small scale furniture in selected venues. It is proposed as the creation of an urban program for the city of Athens in a critical moment of its life.

The Open Air Office is conceived as an invisible installation with minimum means in a city that suffers an emblematic global financial problem. It balances between the refusal of any specific concept of locality (linked to the “neutral”, contemporary culture of the urb and the nowadays condition of immaterial labour) and a reverse emphasis on the local element, through the illumination of particular areas of the idiosyncratic, decadent city centre: the particular local scene welcomes a neutral, global program which in the first place is seen as “appropriate”. The expanding office can be used from those who do not use stable working spaces or from people who are interested in unplanned or organized meetings for cooperation. It welcomes a number of people who find its provisions useful. It is proposed in areas that are in the limits of the abandoned centre or that are related to still functioning city parts.

The Open Air Office implements (with deliberate casualness) some thoughts about the contemporary city. The nowadays city’s structure is linked to the infrastructure of the



Internet, the social networks and some net platforms on which collaborations can be deployed. The project's strategy, operating in the derelict, emptied city centre proposed small scale transformations of a place related to the urban fabric in mediated ways. Furthermore: in the present condition we cannot invent other types of effective interventions, possible transformations of the texture in unpredictable ways using elementary resources. The problem is how to organize large fields by operating at a small scale with a minimum of means, through a multiplication of isolated space solutions.

Linked to a vanishing community the future of immaterial labour can be tested here. The materiality of the common working meetings becomes less important in the conditions of immaterial labour; not because of the "nature" of an immaterial work but because of the possibility of work done in distance, without the "real" material presence of the community; a common working space can in many cases even be excluded from the agenda of a working station; the working condition includes a sole screen and a keyboard orienting the intrusion to a live archive. The open air office challenges a phantasmal view of an invisible image of the city. The modern city of Athens (before the proposal was articulated) was understood in this project as a ruin. Modern Athens was not built for a life of immaterial labour. Not corresponding to the functions it was designed for, the city becomes an idiosyncratic theatre scene.

Choosing an Athenian derelict uncovered space for such an urban programme reminds



some sort of “urban recycling”. A selected unused space re-enters the city life through an architectural decision, concerning a new unexpected function that re-organizes decisively an urban field.

The setting of the functions seems here more important than the proposed “architecture”. The lack of intention to transform the image of the city and the scenographic sufficiency of the bare existing constructions makes the character of this intervention a function of the “invisible”: a lateral lighting of the site will change its significance while its image is maintained “as is”. In the same stable scene (the “scena fissa” of Aldo Rossi) another type of temporary project is performed. However the work produces a mere inversion of Rossi’s concept: it is not anymore the scene that is glorified by showing its stability while different theatrical “city plays” are performed in front of it; it is the performance and its rules that reorder and change the scene that is here conceived as unimportant.

The protocol of a bizarre coexistence of people using private screens in public replicates the invisible home condition as a sudden presentation of an invisible ghost community: at the open air office the multiple community of individual cells perform in an abstract form a view of an invisible collection of individual home screens. Why gather in such a place and why use it? Simple lighten tables and stools install functions; a free wi-fi connection serves as an open call for a gathering; undetermined immaterial works form an agenda of the space. A hidden functionality is proposed as a possibility that uses the city’s decadence as a place of an abstract performance “per se”.



The Open Air Office invisible character serves more as a question concerning the common sphere of the Athens future than as a specific answer. The costless change of the area's lighting can temporarily change its meaning. A strategic reversal of the Charter of Athens rationale is a challenge for today's architecture. Architects are now invited to consider the existing scenes of the city as "transformable without change". They are called to provide different built readings, not different buildings. They are called to penetrate the existing through an alternative series of invisible programs. We named these programs that can form a new layer over the existing: protocols. They are "invisible add-ons" within ruined fields.

The urban deformations that are at stake here run a project of an archeology addressed to the modern city. The dead scenes organize programmatic deviations, new live situations, fields for circumstances leading to different systemic ensembles for the urban centre. The city centre conditions, conceived as empty theatrical scenes, can lead to "versions of programs". The first notes for tomorrow's architecture are undertaken as a practical call for installations on existing city scenes.

The materialization of the Open Air Office used an institutional framework, the art biennial ReMap 3. This first realization of the Open Air Office was realized in an uncovered space at Avdi square and included 48 tables, 100 stools, 48 working lamps, 9 meters of libraries, a printer and a water cooler.



Beyond the gaze

The changing architecture of security between seduction and camouflage

Elisabetta Brighi

The site of the new American embassy in London, expected to open in 2017 and currently being built in Nine Elms in the borough of Wandsworth as the river Thames slithers south, stands atop layers of invisible urban archaeology. This was the site of the first bridge ever to be built in London 3000 years ago and a place of worship — people would journey to this stretch of the Thames riverbank to throw stones into the water as offerings to the gods. In Victorian times a tributary river named Effra was here bricked over and since then forced to run underground, pulsing beneath the city. The site also witnessed a cholera epidemic as the river transmuted into the main city sewer and, by the beginning of the XX century, was declared biologically dead — only to see the first salmon return in 1974. Nine Elms stands today as a place of ruins but also as a place of enchantment. It is a hybrid site suspended between the crudely dystopic denomination of ‘brownfield’, or ‘wasteland’, and the urgency of a tantalising utopia designed to host London’s newest neighbourhood and, from 2017, the most expensive US embassy in the world. Amongst a bed of fibre optic cables, stray plastic bottles, battered sand bags, green tarpaulin, vanishing roads, brown rubble and against the iconic silhouette of Europe’s largest brick building, the 1930s Battersea Power Station, a new ontology is being created, a theatre where architecture and security meet.

Zooming into the design and architectural politics of the new US embassy in London can reveal something about the evolution of the concept, practice and imagery of security from the Cold War to our post-9/11 time. Specifically, along the global/local continuum in which cities stand out as primary political spaces, so much that today ‘the primary fronts for security programs [...] are urban-centred’ (Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 258), security has journeyed from an old paradigm of dominance, deterrence and containment to a new strategy of seduction, camouflage and deception. Camouflage moves security beyond the panoptic logic of the ‘gaze’, where seeing and being seen through surveillance and reconnaissance constitutes its basis, to a new paradigm where ‘what becomes essential is hiding from the gaze, blending into the landscape and into consciousness, melting into imagination and atmosphere, though all in plain sight.

The decision to abandon its prime Mayfair location and move the embassy south was made by the US government in 2008 and was apparently driven by increasing security concerns with the current site as well as the comparatively low cost and high degree of flexibility offered by the Nine Elms area — a semi-derelict brownfield of industrial low-rise buildings, disparagingly defined as ‘wasteland’ until March 2012, when it was renamed ‘Opportunity Area’ by the London Mayor, following the US government decision to move south. Interest-

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ingly, the regeneration programme has so far rather worryingly continued that process of subjugation and commodification of urban space of the kind seen frequently in London over the last three decades, most recently at the Olympic site in the East of London. Developers attracted by the new business opportunities springing forth from Battersea – ‘heavyweights flushed with cash’ in the words of London Mayor Boris Johnson – have announced that the process will bring the property value in the area up of 140%, introduce much-needed mobility infrastructure as well as a host of retail, high-end accommodation and entertainment opportunities meant to ‘support the expected daily influx of 1,800 people to the new

embassy’ (Fulcher 2012). Quite possibly all of this will be catering for an entirely new clientele of residents, rather than the current ones, in yet another instance of dubious urban redevelopment with potentially problematic

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repercussions in terms of social policy.

The centrepiece of the massive regeneration programme in Nine Elms will be, of course, the new US embassy building itself. The design competition was won by the Philadelphia-based KieranTimberlake studio in 2010 and the embassy has already been hailed as a prime example of environmental sustainability, despite its overall cost being estimated to surpass the controversial US embassy in Baghdad. Once completed, the new US embassy in London will be the most expensive US embassy in the world, with a price tag of \$1 billion. The building itself was praised for its innovative design and used by the US government to showcase its newly-launched ‘programme of Design Excellence’, a new design programme for US embassies worldwide.

The design of the embassy features a transparent, ten-storey high, cube-shaped structure which will be clad in 8,300 square meters of blast-resistant and energy-preserving scrim, set atop a four-sided two-storey colonnade, and made to rest on a raised earthen mound. But it is the use of landscape that is perhaps the most interesting architectural choice. Interestingly, the embassy building is to be embedded in a large urban park – 6 hectares of land featuring a number of landscape elements such as a fully functioning moat spiralling around the building, a number of artificial mounds, gardens, as well as so-called ‘ha-ha’ or invisible walls. The embassy’s design is thus intended to ‘blend’ seamlessly into a meticulously constructed landscape through a holistic fusion of urbanism with ‘nature’, of built and organic forms. In the words of James Timberlake, one of the architects, ‘we’re hoping our embassy will reinstate a relationship with the landscape’ (Hunter 2010).

The designers in fact sought to create not only a built structure, but a *continuous* space across the inside and outside, the building and its environment, as well as an experience of ‘apparent freedom of movement and concomitant naturalism’ (Pimlott 2007: 268). In a notable reversal of perspective, the landscape is designed so that its elements can be performatively used to better secure the building – rather than the other way around. As one of the architects puts it, ‘Instead of having fences, we’ve tried to invert the process, so we’ve developed forms that have a first reference to landscape features – the pond, a ha-ha, a meadow, a long, curved bench – which secondarily have a security function . . . *We are able to use the landscape as a security device*’ (Hunter 2010). If one compares this design to the current US embassy in Mayfair – the monumental and imposing modernist building designed by Eero Saarinen in the late 1950s – it is thus clear that architecture today no longer functions

simply as a symbol and display of power, just as security has ceased to be primarily about dominance, deterrence and containment. The design of the new US embassy in Nine Elms seems to function according to a new framing of security – as seduction, deception and camouflage.

Firstly, the aim of having the building's architecture 'mimic' and 'reference' the landscape is to provoke a particular affective and phenomenological experience with the spectator. According to Stephen Kieran (2012), these landscape elements 'secure by eliciting in the eyes of the viewers responses that are associated with a pleasant *experience* of landscape'. The materiality and spatiality of the new US embassy in London therefore is explicitly aimed at seducing and releasing a type of imagery associated with places such as gardens, where naturalness and freedom, ease and happiness are at home. The embassy, to paraphrase John Allen (2006), functions as a seductive presence that entices visitors to circulate and interact in ways that they might not otherwise have chosen through an appearance of inclusion rather than exclusion.

Secondly, security deceptively disappears by blending seamlessly into the environment through a mimetic process of dissimulation and mimicry of natural forms. Rather than being visible, in the architecture of camouflage security becomes a *trompe l'oeil*. Interestingly, security studies have amply examined the paradigm of surveillance as that typical mode of contemporary security in which visibility becomes equated with security, with the 'gaze' as the all-powerful, omni-present, central *deus-ex-machina* (Salter 2010). The pervasiveness and breadth of photographic reconnaissance in contemporary society however is such that, as camouflage forefather Solomon J. Solomon once said, 'the other side of the hill no longer exists'. The architecture of camouflage responds to this state of affairs and offers a new operating paradigm by positing invisibility as the key to security. Hiding in plain sight becomes its main mode or technique.

Ultimately, in this new paradigm security relies heavily on a palimpsest of material and immaterial processes, visible and invisible layers. The architecture of camouflage conjures up a fragile yet tentacular microcosm in which imagination and atmosphere are just as important *actants* as is sheer materiality. Crucially, in posing as ecological or environmental, in seducing and enticing, the architecture of subterfuge, deception and *trompe l'oeil* succeeds in entrenching security concerns – as well as structures of power, space and matter – even further into consciousness. By blending seamlessly into an environment which itself contributes in large part to create, a camouflage embassy achieves what a fortress or monumental embassy cannot, namely penetrating imagination and experience to their very core. The moment in which the spell is broken, or at least temporarily disrupted, can only thus be one of revelation and visibility. As one of the architects explained in response to a question regarding the way people might interact with these invisible landscape elements turned security ploys, such as 'ha-ha' walls, 'if they to cross those boundaries, they will understand how it works' (Kieran 2012).

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Sensing the entrepreneurial city

Christoph Michels

Have you been there? Have you felt the touch of rusty steel and heard the scrunch of neat gravel paths under your feet? Have you pulled the shiny handles of hyper-insulated glass doors that lead into bright foyers with clean concrete floors and soft leather couches? Do you remember strolling through the wonderful worlds of carefully arranged exhibitions and can you recall the exciting stories an audio-guide whispered into your ears? Have you leafed through the thrilling art books on display in the gift shop? And have you recognized the extraordinary quality of their paper? Exhausted and filled with a mixture of boredom and excitement, have you tasted the cappuccino foam and the exquisite pastries, served on well-designed dishes at the museum café? Have you resonated with the atmosphere of the contemporary art gallery?

Galleries and museums have been described as places that organize the relation between visibility and invisibility in manifold ways. Pomian (1994) argues that a museum's exhibits become significant only insofar as they represent and make visible conceptual ideas that are otherwise invisible and absent — such as (specific versions of) history, art, science, and nations. Along these lines, the museum's representational politics have been critically reflected upon, since every exhibition not only makes visible but also renders invisible other ways of framing what it displays (Marstine, 2006). Furthermore, what is made visible or invisible in a museum depends on the gazes of its visitors, “organizing a distinction between those who can and those who cannot see” (Bennett, 1995, p. 164). In this sense, museums have been described as producing an “axis of visibility that operates in relation to subject, object, and space” (Greenhill, 1992, p. 7), enacting specific forms of knowledge and ignorance.

Against the backdrop of the museum as a *visibility machine*, this article suggests considering the (in)visibilities of what can be described as the affective atmospheres of museums. While the cited reflections on the museum concern the organization of exhibits, their display, and the ways in which they can be known, an analysis of atmospheres draws attention to the visceral experience of museums. I am concerned with the museum as a spatial composition of things and bodies that include much more than the objects it claims to represent. A museum's architecture, its surfaces, its environment, its café, its gift shop, its visitors, and many other components form a substantial part of the experience of the museum's atmosphere. And they do so by triggering a specific mood, making our bodies resonate with its components through all its senses.

Although the components that cause specific atmospheres to emerge can be touched, heard, smelled, and seen, I argue that the atmospheres they co-constitute are invisible in a

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threefold way. The first aspect of the *invisibility of atmospheres* concerns “their in-between status with regard to the subject/object distinction” (Anderson, 2009, p. 80; Böhme, 1993). Atmospheres are neither objective nor subjective, but must be understood as fairly fragile compositions that emerge through sensual resonances between human bodies and their environment. In this sense, atmospheres are ‘in the air’. They cannot be seen from outside but can only be experienced from within.

Second, atmospheres are invisible (or more-than-visual), since their “experience is multisensory in its very essence” (Pallasmaa, 2014, p. 19). Touching, smelling, and hearing are as much

The emergence of affective atmospheres is then a process of visceral or unconscious sensation. This is in stark contrast to perception as a process of (re)cognition, which describes a conscious process of understanding

part of the process of enacting atmospheres as seeing is. In the emergence of atmospheres, the different senses cannot clearly

be separated but affect one another. A bad smell or an annoying sound can fundamentally change an atmosphere and can affect our ways of seeing and feeling. Reducing the emergence of atmospheres to processes of seeing would ignore their synesthetic qualities.

Finally, atmospheres can be understood as invisible, since they unfold in an associative and affective way. “[W]e grasp the atmosphere of a place before we identify its details or understand it intellectually” (Pallasmaa, 2014, p. 21). The emergence of affective atmospheres, then, is a process of visceral or unconscious sensation. This is in stark contrast to perception as a process of (re)cognition, which describes a conscious process of understanding. Concerning vision, one might say that the visual sensation of atmospheres depends more on the periphery of our field of vision and less on its focal point. Unfolding through unconscious perception, atmospheres remain invisible in that we are often completely unaware of the ways in which they affect us.

However, the invisibility of atmospheres does not render their social and political dynamics less critical. Pallasmaa (2014), for instance, points out that “[a]tmosphere stimulates activities and guides the imagination” (p. 19) and thus fundamentally shapes what we can (imagine to) do in a specific place. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013) goes as far as to argue that the “unobservability [of atmosphere] has allowed it to become, at least in the last century, the main medium of population control from armed conflicts to domestic room arrangements” (p. 41). The modulation of atmospheres — for instance, through architectural design — can be as much a strategic process of social organizing as the shaping of our bodily capacities to affect and be affected by its environment.

In view of their affective and visceral qualities, atmospheres are always fragile and cannot easily be planned or controlled, since we can never know in which ways the participating components might affect one another. Each visitor to a museum brings a different body with different memories and different capacities to affect and be affected to that museum. Becoming bored, getting excited, or falling in love (with an artwork or another visitor) are all possible scenarios of how a visit to an art museum might unfold. However, the emergence of atmospheres is neither completely random nor apolitical, since the affective capacities of the various components can be shaped strategically, making the emergence of specific affects more or less likely.

Amin and Thrift (2002) describe the strategic transformation of cities as “a concerted attempt to re-engineer the *experience* of cities, one which is on a par with the construction of

Hausmann's boulevards — but happening in many cities around the world" (p. 124, original emphasis). The art gallery presents a case in point for exploring the compositional dynamics of urban atmospheres and their politics. In the course of the past decade, the art gallery has become one of the key sites of urban entrepreneurialism. Whetted by the success of the new Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, cities around the world have massively invested in urban landscape regeneration by way of cultural developments, strategically combining, in an unprecedented way, cultural experience and economic growth of cities (Hall, 2004; Scott, 1997).

These developments were coined by a systematic transformation of museums into exciting destinations for cultural experience and consumption. The role of the art museum as a home to collections, research, and education has become secondary, and is increasingly giving way to organizing the museum as an engine of the 'cultural industry'. In this context, a new typology of the museum has emerged, one that no longer adheres to the concept of the 'white cube' as a detached and independent exhibition space. On the contrary, the new museum renders a visit into a multisensuous experience that tightly interweaves the experience of art, exciting architecture, culinary pleasure, and shopping with an urban experience. Landmark architecture plays a key role this (re)modulation of the museum experience, providing both stimulating backdrops to exhibitions and a 'hard-branding' of "the city as the pre-eminent and strategic site for collective conspicuous consumption and celebration" (Evans, 2003, p. 438). Furthermore, the new museum experience announces itself in the growing importance of museum cafés and gift shops. London's Victoria and Albert Museum, for instance, was — already in the 1990s — advertised as "an ace caff with quite a nice museum attached" (McClellan, 2008, p. 193). Furthermore, the museum gift shop today is not only a "commercial barrier between the city and the art, it paradoxically has also become an enhancement of the 'museum experience'" (Scheeren, 2004, p. 255).

Although these transformations of the art museum are quite tangible and visible, their effects unfold in subtler and more-than-visible ways, carefully modulating the museum's atmosphere into an aesthetic composition that affects all the senses. And the art gallery presents only one example of the strategic modulation of urban atmospheres. We are equally familiar with the refurbishments of historic quarters, the redevelopment of urban waterfronts and harbors, or the presentation of heritage buildings and sites. As much as these places differ from one another, they evoke a similar atmosphere, which raises the question: What else remains to be done in the entrepreneurial city, besides marveling and having another latte macchiato?

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Night & Invisibility in Jakarta

Jérôme Tadié

Saturday night at around 1 am, in a street in the Northern part of Jakarta, not far from the Mangga Besar entertainment district. We are entering an alley bordered by motor-cycles, cars and food stalls, just in front of karaokes, spas or massage parlours and bars. One of them displays "Bar and Massage". Once inside, a rather stuffy, smoky and ill-lit atmosphere, with pounding music and an elevated platform with a pole, on which dancers start to undress till fully naked. Indonesia is a country where nudity is prohibited in public venues. Nonetheless, it is a policeman from the police ward in charge of the neighbourhood who showed me the venue, knowing well where to go and what was happening in his precinct.

Midnight in a South Jakarta mall. All the stores are closed, but the mall is still open with security guards by the entrance. The escalators are not operating. Still we climb them and come to a discotheque which is open. It is a gay establishment and its existence is not advertised outside. Homosexuality is legal in Indonesia (except in the province of Aceh), but it is often looked down on. [field notes]

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These two instances of urban invisibles in Jakarta come from different repertoires. Yet they draw on similar methods of invisibility in order to carry out, on the one hand, illegal activities, on the other, marginal forms of sociability. They both question the logics and meanings of urban invisibility, especially at night. Although such attractions are part of the mainstream leisure sector, some activities must take place out of sight. The examples suggest how, and through what types of mechanisms, in a major metropolis of the Global South, invisibility can play a part in the functioning and governance of the city, while questioning the status of what is displayed to the general view.

First, the night is a kind of mask for these activities: in Indonesia, as in many other places, it is a time when one should stay home, to avoid being exposed to crime as well as other 'mystical' influences. It is a time of vulnerability, when one must be more alert. As a consequence, it is also a grey zone, when what is happening goes unnoticed, when "daily people" are less aware of what goes on in the city. In the above extracts, the darkness in the mall and the closure of most of the shops and restaurants prevent interaction, as well as conflict, between the various activities of the mall — most of its customers are unaware of the existence of such a club. In Mangga Besar, the accumulation of night venues also prevents any person not familiar with the neighbourhood from identifying the peculiar discotheque.

A second type of invisibility comes from maintaining appearances that do not correspond

exactly to what is inside the venues. Both have a façade that hides their activities. Signs here suggest that something different is happening from what is shown. Invisibility results from differences between what seems to exist and what is actually happening, as if what is visible outside and what is happening inside existed in parallel worlds. The absence of proper lighting in one case could suggest that the place is closed, even if guards are stationed outside. The “Bar and Massage” sign does not indicate a public strip-tease club. Yet, these two signs show the role played by façades for these activities, through their reference to other types of content. Invisibility is part of the organisation of the city. Parallelism and similitude are

Invisibility results from differences between what seems to exist and what is actually happening, as if what is visible outside and what is happening inside existed in parallel worlds

important to understand these urban landscapes. At night, a bar might be a strip-tease venue, a hotel a night club with small rooms in order to circumvent the Ramadan ban on discotheques, a regulation setting closing time

at 4 am might be a mere piece of paper, a woman a ghost, an Islamist demonstration in a leisure neighbourhood a means of racketing a club, etc.

In all these parallels, one sees how in Jakarta, the limits between visibility and invisibility overlap, how some ways of functioning are often disguised, how apparent meanings might be deceitful. Invisibility results from the discrepancies between outside sign and inside content: different people can give different meanings to the same post, situation or policy. The same message can be endowed with different meanings according to divergent means of understanding what is happening. While according to some authors the separation between places results from juxtapositions of different cultural understandings¹, here spaces and practices seem to be linked to the whole functioning of the city. Using the metaphor of dubbing, Boelstorff² points out that certain phenomena might look alike and yet have different interpretations according to where one is located. The tension between what is advertised and the actual content, between a rule and its application, seems a case in point: apparent breaches of the law are in fact part of the organisation of the city.

Invisibility in the city is often seen as a tactic used by urban subaltern people and outsiders to cope with the main constraints of society, by concealing themselves in order to pursue their business³. On the contrary, here such hiding techniques are employed by businesses owned by powerful stakeholders. The clubs usually belong to well-connected entrepreneurs, hardly a marginal category. Rather than being victims, these stakeholders are well connected to the government and its control agencies. In the excerpts from the field diary quoted above we find entrepreneurs owning and running the business, policemen not only turning a blind eye but actively introducing friends to the venue. This process of concealment and exposure is quite telling of the status of certain rules in the city. Such discrepancies are part of a territorial system where what counts is to keep things going and money flowing. Official regulations are regarded as distant references which, besides designating an official agency in charge of

1 M. Foucault (1967), « Des Espaces autres », in *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987.

2 T. Boelstorff (2005), *The Gay Archipelago. Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.

3 See for instance E. Goffman (1963/1977), *Stigmates. Les usages sociaux des handicaps*, Paris, Minuit ; H. Becker (1963), *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York, The Free Press ; M. de Certeau (1980/1990), *L'invention du quotidien, Arts de faire*, Paris, Gallimard ; and G. Chauncey (1994), *Gay New York. Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, New York, BasicBooks.

the place, have little practical value.

Thus, invisibility appears as a paradoxical means to reduce risks and costs for the entrepreneurs who, by remaining outside the public sphere, are able to circumvent regulations depending on their contingent interests. Thus an unenforced closing-time regulation allows venues to remain open until late in the morning, when patrons and big fishes arrive. Invisibility thus functions as a means to keep the legal sphere at a convenient distance, letting things happen without interfering with their details. It is when these invisible practices damage the image of affluent social groups, that they are denounced. For instance, in 2014, a big night club in Jakarta well known for drug use (in a country where drug trafficking leads to death penalty) was shut down when a policeman died of an overdose inside.

These modes of functioning are not restricted to night-time economy. Rather, they are a testimony of how the city is managed. Similar mechanisms also exist in other domains of city life. In the case of the police, payoffs are regularly exposed by NGOs, newspapers and researchers. In the city, regulations are often regarded as the basis for negotiation. Yet, these phenomena show that circumvention of regulations and informal arrangements among people are not exceptional, but rather part of an everyday process. In conclusion, different points of view offer different ways to understand the city and its governance. Night-time invisibility questions the thresholds between what is visible and what is invisible, as well as urban policies and practices at large.



Segregated Visibilities On Purity and the Nonsense of Public Toilets

Caterina Nirta

“Are you going to use the girls’ toilets? This is not meant to be rude. I’m just interested”.¹ This is the most recurring question a transgender individual faces when attempting to breach the purity of the highly normative space of public toilets. A space where the symbolic and the material generate a curious set of relations between power and surveillance which come into play and clash with the human body and its irreducible material essence made of physical presence and biological needs. This question is not just that: it carries a heavy subtext of judgment and highlights a failed identification with the other which is somehow a failed identification with the self. It creates a space wherein the transgender is deemed unfit, and presents a spatial paradigm wherein the disobedient body that rebels against that imposed model is alienated: pressed to conform, excluded, belittled, criminalised, misrepresented, denied. Ultimately, it voices a specific assumption: the ambiguous social and spatial positioning of transgender is problematic and therefore must be diverted and transformed into something easily recognisable.

The space of public toilets and their inflexible boundaries do precisely that: they silence dissonant subjectivities and shape forever their urban experience creating oppositions that reinforce their inviolable codes of practice. The hierarchical structure of urban spaces, “mired in misconceptions and assumptions, habits and unreflective gestures”;² assumes even sharper connotations within public toilets. Caught in this normative equilibrium between what can be seen or shown and what should remain unspoken is the transgender: a site of contradictions that highlight a narrative of survival and spatial compromise.

In this paradigm, visibility and invisibility play a peculiar role in the mediation for social validation and recognition. This negotiation becomes all the more significant when it comes to transgender individuals whose body image and sense of self are often so dissonant to unsettle the relentless normative force of this sex-segregates space. Here everything, from architecture to provision, is aimed to control every aspect of the urban and social experience: the lights, the walls, the mirrors, the cubicles and the stalls, everything has its place while individuals are scanned, labelled and categorised. The meaning constructed and pursued in the public toilets is then transferred outside and reaches the collective. As a result, not

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¹ Rebecca Lovelas, young MtF transgender, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNXQBDDWikk>. This and the other diaries cited in this article belong to transgender individuals who identify beyond the binary and who, in their video diaries, share the challenges and victories in their day-to-day experience of urban spaces. The diaries are part of a broader research project on dissonant subjectivities.

² Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside, Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (MIT Press 2001) p.115

to match certain imposed standards, that is, not to translate literally into what is expected, results into a narrative of otherness where gender is the big divider, and not to match those requirements means to unsettle that division and become exposed to scrutiny.

The two-dimensional (symbolic-material) spatial configuration of public toilets reflects and emphasises the binary division between men and women in everyday urban experience on both a personal and public level. Toilets create and dictate a spatiality of their own by imposing on the single person what is acceptable collectively, thus bringing the private to the public and meticulously maintaining elements of both through their architecture and provision. Their iconic 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' signs not only mark a space of solitary confinement, but are also imperatives of normative reinforcement of gender roles, sexuality and power relations: they are spaces suspended between the known and the hidden, between what can be told and what one would rather like not to know.

The ideal of purity of bodies is paramount in this context. Its impossibility is made visible and reiterated each time the transgender subject steps into that rigid and sex-segregated spatiality. The term rigid here does not only refer to an uncompromising binary partition of life – feminine female, masculine male – but also to a framework wherein gender and sexuality become inscribed in architecture, and where space is managed and controlled in the name of health and hygiene. In this mission for sanitisation, trans subjectivity constitutes a point of impurity: it embodies the uncertain, the unclear, the unsorted and the unstable body and, more dangerously, represents the dissolution of that self-alimented yet mutually-informed stability between polarities.

Interestingly, the argument against transgender individuals using gendered toilets is played out in terms of oppositions and places transgendered and non-transgendered people in conflict with each other. In this configuration, the materiality of the body is dramatically significant and everything, from social dynamics and personal interaction to physical spatiality (i.e. furniture) and subtext, depend so tightly on the one or the other gender and its embodiment. And it is especially in these instances that the ideal of purity is pursued. In this economy of resistance and defence, the non-transgender is the *natural* occupier, the one who retains the primordial right to use that gendered space, and the transgender is the intruder, the deceitful subject who aims to disrupt that *natural* order of things.

These concepts of purity, univocality and singleness, and the impossibility to replicate those ideals in life, are best captured by Derrida's notion of monolingualism.³ It highlights the dogmatic and unquestioned singleness of language, a form of sovereignty which represents the hegemonic force of the speaker who possesses it. But the I-ness of the speaker must admit defeat, for it must come to terms with the configuration of bodies and space which will pass through its meaning and transform it into something else, thus reaffirming the failure of semantic purity.

That transformation creates a gap – the space between signifiers (which cannot be filled because of the collision between two purities that do not meet half-way) – whose state of perpetual uncertainty (and lack of control) guarantees the necessary movement of contamination. This is where sense is formed for Deleuze. Namely, away from the *doxa* of language and right in the chaotic contamination of bodies, affects and notions. "We may not even say that sense exists either in things or in the mind; it has neither physical nor mental

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2001).

existence. . . In fact — Deleuze affirms — we can only infer it indirectly”.⁴ It is only through empiricism — the only condition of life — that we may discern the idea from language and extrapolate sense: “Only empiricism knows how to transcend the experimental dimensions of the visible without falling into ideas”.⁵

Accordingly, absolute, *pure* sense does not exist, it “is not a quality in the thing, but an attribute which is said of the thing... [it is] what is expressed [but] does not exist outside its expression”.⁶ Difference is then not the obstacle to producing a *pure* translation, it is not the dissonant element of that (failed) smooth negotiation between signs. Rather, difference originates in the determination of each subjectivity. It is intrinsic to signs. Sense is only drawn from difference and finds its outmost expression in its constitutional singularity (which is also its impossibility).

The more successful in their transition, the more invisible they become in space. This is indicative of the conforming trajectory mapped out by this particular urban experience, and shows how to resist such a demand means to accept a path of vulnerability

The need for transgender subjectivities to perform a translation between body and mind, and then to translate their corporeality into a language acceptable to normativity, is emphasised to the extreme when confined within the stiff spatiality of public toilets. The impossibility of that translation generates a space of uncertainty — of the unknown — that the physical spacing of public toilets demands on the one hand, and systematically suppresses on the other. The transgender is caught in the middle. It is the germ, the failure of the translation. If non-transgender individuals are enabled to appropriate space safely, the unprivileged body of the transgendered must constantly mediate its spatial location.

The bathroom is so important and so terrifying because . . . these are spaces for men and for women and now it's time to choose, and now it's that breaking point, that first step . . . It can make some people cry, it can make people decide not to use the bathroom, it can make people run away and scream.⁷

The life narrative of non-conforming subjectivities suggests that the question of visibility within public toilets is often double-faced. While ‘passing’ well is certainly a preferable state to find oneself in — ‘If you pass then you don’t have to worry’⁸ — and can often be considered an accomplishment, it also makes the transgender individual invisible because it blanks out its specificity and erases its presence in space. This is a recurring concern amongst transgender subjects who wish to maintain the individuality of their trans experience alive. To leave a trace of oneself and of one’s history becomes vital when everything around works for the dissolution of that particular individuation.⁹ “I wonder how easy it would be for me to

4 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London, New York: Continuum 2004) p. 23.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.* 24.

7 Dylan Druish, young MtF transgender, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dYhCs6ZLU>.

8 Aeris Houlihan, MtF transgender, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kzvStBPCiM>.

9 Here I am particularly referring to the Gender Reassignment Act 2004 (GRA) and its principle of stability of gender. The third requirement for legal gender recognition is the intent to “continue to live in the required gender until death”. This predicament poses first of all an issue of equity because it demands an a priori engagement with an ideal of solidity of gender that non-trans individuals are not expected to engage with and produce (this based on the assumption that gender is stable and those who are not diagnosed with gender dysphoria would not question this notion in the first place), but it also opens far more complex issues caused by a more dangerous ideal, that of purity of gender. In the context of the GRA, by purity of gender I mean

disappear and become invisible to myself.”¹⁰ So what we have is the mediation between the exposure of one’s trans specificity (and the consequent variables this entails: from hostility to verbal aggression and physical violence) and the neutralisation of one-trans-self measured by a scale of success. The more successful in their transition, the more invisible they become in space. This is indicative of the conforming trajectory mapped out by this particular urban experience, and shows how to resist such a demand means to accept a path of vulnerability.

Furthermore, the dialectical exchange between what is visible and what is invisible is supported by the power reiterated through spatial conventions, and operates in the highly regulated space of public toilets both by reducing and exaggerating the perceived presence of transgender. Either way, it forces them to translate their radical, three dimensional and constitutional difference into a mono dimensional narrative of sameness.

The spatial essentialisms in the collective conceptualisation and understanding of body/mind, private/public, visible/invisible, male/female collide with the need for sense, for they remain trapped in the impossible game of translations. A game which aims to create a despotic system of meaning applicable to all subjectivities. We have seen how public toilets are an emblematic example of this system. Transgender individuals, in this configuration, are the material presence of that semantic, structural and spatial failure. The striking realisation that purity is never achieved. A visible reminder of that non-sense that translations aim to reproduce in vain.

two things specifically: First, the assumption that gender is recognised insofar as it travels on a female/male binary – and therefore any blurry positioning is suppressed. With uncertainty must also go the possibility that feminine and masculine may cohabit within the same subjectivity. Secondly, the Gender Recognition Certificate can overwrite one’s history erasing any traces of gender discontinuity in favour of gender coherence, that is, an ideal that gender must be pure and uncontaminated.

¹⁰ Tom, FtM <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKvply4lLtI>.

Waste. The political significance of the city's suppressed other

**Chrysanthe
Constantinou**

Beneath the city's achievement as a grand machine of accumulation of matter, in invisibility lies the vast and vague sphere of waste accumulation. In invisibility, a huge network of waste flows is possibly rewriting economies as we know them, reproducing life conditions driven by the politics of wealth. In this parallel territory, recycling is a big business for the few. For others, it is a dangerous way of engaging the world: an army of invisible, undocumented people recycle city waste producing a wealth that is nowhere to be seen, undocumented as it is in official economic transactions. What is invisible, in fact, is what holds the urban apparatuses of accumulation together.

Nowadays Greece is a paradigmatic country where waste is being recycled by people who live at the margins of the law. Greece can't recycle its own waste. The recycling process amounts to about 3 million tons of iron per year. About 80% of such incredible quantity is created by illegal, undocumented people, the majority of which live and operate in Athens. The weak institutional recycling system, and the parallel demand for raw materials, composes the urban itself as a horizon within which a parallel invisible recycling network takes place. In 2011, film director Christos Karakepelis has released *Raw Material*. The protagonists of this documentary feature are seven people who are, as the director himself puts it, "just some representatives of the vast army of desperados who recycle Greece's metal. They are the heroes of *Raw Material*, as well as raw materials themselves. State, middlemen, eco-entrepreneurs and industrialists hush up the mythic wealth their labour produces for others."¹

Living in a country which is facing a deep economic crisis, huge demographic siftings, and high amounts of unemployment, more and more people without residence papers and thus lacking employment opportunities live by collecting and scavenge wastes. It is estimated that Athens currently has 80,000 rag collectors and metal peddlers. The metal hunts begins early in the morning, using supermarket trolleys and tricycles pushed in the streets. The collected materials follow the path to the belly of the recycling system, scraping is done. Materials are stripped from other components in order to leave metal clean. A camp in the neighbourhood of Eleonas hosts more than 1,000 people making their life out of waste treatment. The environment there is made of houses next to piles of wastes, plastic stuff which, once burnt, releases poisonous gases, a suffocating atmosphere, a contaminated landscape. Such is the full picture of the 're-evaluation process'.

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¹ Vanessa McMahon, "Raw material: Interview with Hristos Karakepelis", March 31, 2011, Online at http://www.filmfestivals.com/blog/vanessa_mcmahon/raw_material_interview_with_christos_karakepelis

Close to the refugee camp, several junkyards have opened, waiting for the scavengers to bring the scrap metal. Nowadays it is estimated that there are around 500 junkyards in the urban region, dispersed in the fragmented post-industrial landscape, hidden and almost invisible, as well as absolutely illegal. Collectors deliver their scrap metal which is bought at extremely cheap price. In turn, the junkyard owners sell scrap metal to big foundries, most of which are likewise operating illegally.

The most under-paid are the collectors and scrapers, who can't even imagine the wealth they generate. A wealth that is nowhere to be seen, never being documented by any service, it comes with great exploitation,

In invisibility, a huge network of waste flows is possibly rewriting economies as we know them, reproducing life conditions driven by the politics of wealth

illegal jobs, and also a wealth that rests behind the name of 'recycling'. The transactions are taking place with the tolerance of the Greek authorities and not, of course, because they are unable to intervene. The situation is a win-win.

The scrapers are making their living in the

least illegal way. What is more, the recyclable materials that used to end up in dumps, are recycled. Finally, there is a million-euro turnover in this industry: a fortune for those on the higher levels of the chain².

"Every 20 minutes a steel factory's foundries turn about 100 tons of scrap into liquid, producing between 85 and 90 tons of steel. This continues 24 hours a day, seven days a week"³. The profit is huge. All these materials end up in the construction industry in Greece and abroad: "In 1990 the Greek industry was producing one million tons of steel a year. Currently produces three, serving the real estate of the entire Mediterranean"⁴.

People at the margins of law thus become the raw material of the recycling industry. The state of exception becomes the rule, establishing a consistent network that operates, based upon constant supply demand. Such conditions are built upon a pile of raw material: raw material as legal rejection, people as raw material. The unemployed and the undocumented find their way towards capitalist inclusion, the capitalist system finds a fertile ground to mix formal and informal economies, visible and invisible arenas, plasticity of operators, an absolutely contingent labour.

As long as it is able to extract use-value, the system remains indifferent to the legal status, the qualifications and living conditions of people. Waste collectors are outcasts shifting between negative and positive value, between visible and invisible territories, between clean and dirty grounds. The waste seems a superfluous excrement, but it can shift again to an employed matter in the capital accumulation. Likewise, although not formally employed in the market accumulation and thus excluded from the state's calculations, waste collectors are crucial value producers:

They are excluded at once from the mainstream economic system and from state's regulations, but they are still employed by the capitalist mode of value production . . . It is not necessarily the nature of their business that excludes the new contemporary *Lumpen* from a proper bourgeois life-form endowed with certain civil rights, but the bio-political control and denial of its very physical existence that constitutes the *Lumpen* life-form — a paradoxical form of life deprived of its proper form.⁵

2 M. Hulot 2011 "The scraper and the trolley", online at <http://www.ough.gr/index.php>

3 Tassos Brekoulakis, "Ode on a Grecian Pile of Crap. A Visit to Athens' secret and massive garbage town", online at <http://www.vice.com/read/ode-on-a-grecian-pile-of-crap>

4 Vanessa McMahon, Raw material: Interview with Hristos Karakepelis, Vanessa McMahon's blog, March 31, 2011

5 Sami Khatib, Jan van Eyck Academie Maastricht, "On Lumpen, Nihilism, and Unemployed Negativity. Marx,

Regardless how dirty it is, the work of these contemporary Lumpen it is still capitalistic. Their lives are in state of exception stripped to the bare necessities of life:

Maybe Agamben's famous appropriation of the Latin *homo sacer*, the one that cannot be sacrificed but killed without punishment, should be supplemented by its political-economic face: the *homo Lumpig*, the Lumpen one whose physical ("bare") existence is precarious and is not eligible to be the regular bearer of labour power (for instance illegalized migrants, *sans papiers*) . . . However, this new Lumpen people, these contemporary ragpickers and their rags, do not contradict the economic logic of waste and recycling unless they break with the form of capitalist utilizability.⁶

At the same time, it is in their practice that one can find the political significance of the *homo Lumpig*. For their practice as such creates its own platforms of operation. Released from the law, and with the creation of their own laws and territories, the contemporary Lumpen seem to open up a political possibility emerging of our modern heritage: "Yet life released from the law, despite the civil death this implies, is also, potentially, and in an extreme manner, a kind of liberty-namely, the potential ground of a new law, or more provocatively, the potential to be a law unto oneself."

This life creates an exceptional territory with its own specific identities, daily practices and spatial conditions that are in fact by themselves political, since they express a territory that surpasses the abstraction and appropriation of the capitalist system. Within this framework, the attention for a political potential lies upon this "invisible" territory itself, which expresses the effects of the recycling system and simultaneously a criticism against it. It is *excess*, an exceptional territory which should not to be seen as an end of being, but as a means of becoming, in order to be liberated from the privileges that the sovereign system posits.

Benjamin, and Bataille". Paper at Historical Materialsim Annual Conference, (2012, London),p. 5
6 Calarco, M, DeCaroli. S. Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life. (2007 Stanford University Press) p.57



Rooftop Architecture in Istanbul

**Esen Gökçe
Özdamar**

Following the rapid construction of apartments in the 1980s, Istanbul and other major cities in Turkey witnessed extraordinary changes. Some immigrants who settled there began breeding cattle in rooftop structures on top of existing apartment buildings, due to the lack of extra space for stables or storage. This practice resulted in informal dwellings called *gecekondus*, which were initially occupied and built at night and later transformed into illegal apartments. These small dwellings built overnight were generally a single room in which an entire family resided with all necessary housing facilities therein incorporated. Later modifications were mainly implemented in the single room and included alterations such as horizontal and/or vertical enlargement as the number of inhabitants grew, or division of the space into several rooms based on the economic situation of residents. Since the 1980s, the *gecekondus* and the city grew in much the same manner, under the pressure of a population boom and without any proper plan. The city turned into a collection of *gecekondus* embedded on rooftops. Although these spaces are no longer used for raising animals, the construction of these illegal rooftop structures — what I refer to as the “fugitive rooftop” — can be observed today in the many different formations on top of apartment, public, and historical buildings, or even restored ships.

The incorporation into the urban fabric through settlement and housing has become more important than social integration through employment in urban scene. This is a “neglected dimension of the process of modernization”. The dynamics of immigrant incorporation thus relies on access to land and housing (Keyder, 2005:125). Metaphorically, the roof is a protective element — a shelter — which creates a threshold for one’s interactions with the world outside the home. It symbolizes one’s eagerness to confront the city and constitutes an essential aspect of the borders between inside/outside, self/world, and practical/ideal (Silverstein, 1993). At an urban scale, the rooftop is a material embodiment of temporal and spatial relations between residents and the public realm. It provides potential space for an inhabitable environment. The utilization of this space thus represents a process of adaptation to metropolitan life. The rooftop can also be regarded as supporting urban densification, especially in vertically developing cities in that it is “replenishing open space for social interaction” (Pomeroy, 2012:423). This open space sometimes takes the parasitic forms of art galleries or lofts, which are sometimes referred to as ‘urban nomads’.

However, in the case of Istanbul, the visual stimulus of the rooftop is a confrontation between the inhabitants and the complexities of the contemporary city. It displays the transformation of the city. The fugitive rooftop creates a threshold between visibility and invisibility in

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the public realm, displaying a user-designer dichotomy at the edge of planning processes. On one hand, it negotiates unvoiced needs and urban rights of residents to inhabit property in the decreasing fabric of urban space, which has been invaded by gentrification, gated communities, and large-scale housing units, all suggesting a poor quality environment. On the other hand, it triggers legally built illegal construction in Istanbul, which includes over densification through loopholes in legal restrictions, land development planning and control laws. These constructions trigger urban transformation as well as the potential associated risks. Although contravening both the city construction regulations and landowner's rights, the rooftop functions as a reaction to the intended meanings of the built environment. In this way, the environment is constructed and limited by legislation as well as various actors in government, architecture, and urban planning.

Addressing invisibility in housing

In Istanbul, where fugitive rooftop dwellings display invisibility in the city, the situation is particularly bleak in the sense that these constructions symbolize an inequality in the share of public land. They represent either a need for survival or a pleasure-driven and hedonistic act – the occupation of space. Yet they are also a critical display of the boundary between the work of the architect and non-architect (Broekema and Kuipers, 2013). The vast number of temporary housing advertisements marketing distinctive lifestyles through the rooftop are blurring the distinction. Creating a sense of power by providing a panoramic view of the city and a means of surveillance, these structures remind us that visibility is power in the realm of the urban narrative. Rooftop structures are a primary means for becoming visible in a city formed by housing authorities, policy makers, and the real-estate market. Betsky refers to rooftop development as the “democratisation of view,” providing opportunities for society to survey the city as a means of recreation and delight. In *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier similarly highlighted the importance of rooftop terraces not just to replenish the area consumed by the building, but also to provide space for social health and well being (Pomeroy, 2012: 413).

Crucial questions nonetheless remain: can a rooftop function as a public space? Can symbiosis between public and private interests be created in the design process and subsequent management? The fugitive rooftop city has inspired new discussion about residents' involvement with or attachment to the city. These everyday interventions upon the built environment reveal new forms of the self-organization of space through interaction and communication. However, these interactions also highlight that the meaning of a city is an open, dynamic hybrid structure. Amos Rapoport (1994) calls this “the invisible” in human interaction with the environment. According to Rapoport, invisibility starts with relationships. The role of the invisible in design, concepts, and theory is an important factor in all of these processes. Each environment has many invisible aspects that are relative and guide behavior patterns (Rapoport, 1994: 71).

In the traditional construction process, the user and designer was the same person. Design was still somewhat “open,” in the sense that it could easily be altered depending on the needs, lifestyles, ideals, and criticism of future users in terms of flexibility. In contrast, contemporary designers operate as instructors who provide models for the “organization of the system settings” (Rapoport, 1994:71). Therefore, unlike traditional processes, the user becomes invisible or anonymous to the designer. Minute shifts of awareness have developed in planning and the participation process in Turkey since Rapoport mentioned this type of invisibility. According to Rapoport, “People live in systems of settings, a partial visible

expression of which is the cultural landscape". However, the ignored and rejected become the invisible (Rapoport, 1994: 68). Architecture is "typically primarily concerned with fixed-feature elements". Here, the "invisible" is what the environment is about; it supports and guides behavior (Rapoport, 1994: 70). However, it is movement and change, and the unfixed elements and patterns of behavior that create meaning.

In Turkey, and chiefly in İstanbul, such invisibility refers to the widely appreciated understanding of dwellers as users. Architect conceptualize the user as "a person or persons expected to occupy the structure", implying a person "who could not normally be expected to contribute to formulating the architect's brief" (Forty, 2000: 312). For Lefebvre (1991:43), users "passively experienced whatever was

The fugitive rooftop creates a threshold between visibility and invisibility in the public realm, displaying a user-designer dichotomy at the edge of planning processes

imposed upon them in as much as it was more or less thoroughly inserted into or justified by their representational space". Here, invisibility is formed because of an inability to confront the various aspects of dwellers as well as unvoiced urban rights and participatory processes. Moreover, the vast numbers of unregistered changes to buildings after the construction process enable creation of memory in the perception of environment, making the built environment a simple representative and transient form of image that can be easily consumed. There is a lack of a grounded approach to dealing with diversity in the city, especially for architects to understand diversity in forms of dwelling. Participation in traditional construction processes where the architect is the leader is not likely to work in Turkey today. The invisibility of rooftop dwellings displays lack of a common socially engaged ground for debate about living in the city, which inhibits the formation of an open city.

In conclusion, the fugitive rooftop displays the borders of invisible realities; encounter with the rooftop emphasizes hybridization of the city through interaction with — and involvement in — architecture. However, diversity and heterogeneity in the city are being somewhat erased by a top-down approach to urban planning, and a response to variability and plurality is missing in urban space. The fugitive rooftop city no longer fosters heterogeneity, rather, it is a misunderstood space of urban relations.

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Fire, (In)visibility and the Magic of the State

Alex Wafer

What follows is a brief description of a fire that ravaged an informal settlement in the urban peripheries of Johannesburg in October 2014. What this catastrophic yet relatively prosaic event demonstrates is not only the invisibility of the urban precariat in a contemporary city of the global South, but the power of fire in producing particular forms of visibility; specifically the ways in which the state is made visible through the fire.

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Fire

Early October, the stubborn end of a cold, dry winter. The dusty landscape has not seen rain for almost six months now. Driving on the R512, an over-used and dusty regional artery that links Johannesburg with the Magaliesburg Mountains, a popular lake-side escape for the wealthy, and leads eventually to the platinum-rich mining provinces of the north. The old Johannesburg city-centre is from this vantage point a series of grey angular blocks on a hazy horizon some thirty kilometers to the south. The warehouses and drab-looking office-parks that line the road, surrounded by rusty barbed-wire fences, betray the steady creep of ex-urban sprawl far beyond the traditional urban edge. Along the wide dusty shoulder of the road, an informal economy of car-washers, cold-drink sellers and taxi¹ depots thrives. And against the clear blue sky – a testament to the unseasonably late spring rains – a massive black pillar of smoke rises in a giant vortex.

Following the plume of smoke, we weave our way through the back-streets, emerging eventually on a service road behind several warehouses, overlooking an abandoned and overgrown field that slopes gently down towards a small stream. Across from the stream is a dense cluster of several hundred homes – “shacks” made of metal sheets and wooden poles. Slightly upstream a garbage dump leaks into the stream. The settlement is on fire; at least a quarter of the structures are on fire and the flames are moving quickly up the slope, fanned by winds that rush up the valley. The heat – even from across the valley – is intense. We stand with several other onlookers under a cluster of wild trees and watch, mesmerized, as the flames burn through the dry structures.

I am compelled by the image of a man standing on the roof of a small shack. All around him thick black smoke bellows, as flames the height of three-storey buildings lick at the edges of the structure. We watch in impotent suspension as the figure comes in and out of view, the smoke that surrounds him buffeted by the wind.

¹ ‘Taxi’ is the colloquial term for a mini-bus, the informal public transport system that most working-class South African’s rely upon.

“Move, man!” one of us shouts, although the voice is lost in the heat and the wind. The shirtless man stands atop the structure, throwing buckets of water at the monstrous fire, presumably the last man in an invisible (at least to us from this vantage) human chain passing buckets of water in a vain attempt to halt the fire. As we stood watching the fire consume the small houses, men and women – some dressed in workers coveralls – ran from the warehouses past our little group of voyeurs, down the small informal footpath, and across the small stream, towards their burning homes. One man cried in anguish and fell to his knees – there was clearly nothing left to run towards.

Invisibility

Until the fire, which destroyed most of the homes, the informal settlement was largely invisible. It has no official name, and it does not appear on Google maps, although it is clearly visible on a satellite image. Of course, its invisibility does not mean that it is not seen, nor that power and capital do not circulate through its cramped and dirty alleyways – not unlike the fire that ravaged the settlement. McFarlane (2008) speaks about urban infrastructures as assemblages that exclude and include – that mark inequality in their materiality. The informal settlement – this one, but also as a broader social category – is an assemblage of metal, wood, poverty, capital and excluded bodies – what Mbembe (2004) would call superfluous bodies. This assemblage contains a range of negative associations (informality, poverty, immigrants etc.) which render it not so much invisible as hidden. These are indeed the urban precariat – low-paid, informal and precarious workers, living in the urban peripheries. It was with bitter irony that the following day, as people gathered together the burnt remnants of their lives, I saw streams of people walking to and from a local building-supply warehouse, carrying new sheets of metal and new wooden poles.

In this way, then, the fire was not only destructive but curiously productive, in revealing the ways in which the informal settlement is hidden, made invisible. The fire exposed the inequality that pervades the urban landscape: as we watched the fire destroy the settlement, we heard every few minutes a loud explosion, followed by a burst of flames. Gas canisters exploding and igniting – there is no electricity provision for the settlement, so homes rely on gas or paraffin. The rumors that spread as the fire burned was that the fire was started by a child knocking over a paraffin stove. School holidays and few social facilities; children are left unattended at home while parents find low-paid day-jobs. The fire department did eventually arrive at the scene, but were unable to access the fire because the road leading into the settlement is a virtually inaccessible dirt road with pot-holes. Where a truck may have been able to pass, residents had already blocked the road with possessions rescued from burning homes. The best option, it was decided, was to contain the blaze and let it burn itself out.

The fire was also productive of race in strange ways. While we were watching the fire burn, a man next to me uttered with dispassionate cynicism: “Us blacks are cursed!” In a perverse irony, while visiting the site the following day a man from a nearby middle-class church community who were distributing blankets told me: “Blacks are so resilient.” Maybe what they both meant was that through the event of the fire, the intersection of race and inequality were made a little less invisible.

Finally, and perhaps opaquely, the fire is productive of life itself. The day after the fire, the settlement was being rebuilt: buckled metal sheets were bashed into shape, cement foundations were swept and cleared, burnt detritus was carted away to a nearby field. As one man said to me: “What can you do? That’s life!”. Not much more than bare life, though (Agamben 1998). “This is what I am now” another man told me; “the clothes on my back”.

State

As James Scott (1998) has suggested, and Corbridge *et al.* (2005) have elaborated, invisibility is also a relative term — a question of who is seeing whom. The very next day after the fire, the informal settlement was front-page news in the local media. Not much else to report on at the time, perhaps. There were a host of organizations present, variously well coordinated — a scared-looking church group throwing bread from the back of a van, an animal safety group (apparently there were many stray dogs trapped in the fire), several news agencies looking for a scoop. A large and well-funded charity organization, Gift of the Givers, had set up a crisis-management headquarters in an open field next to the settlement, coordinating the distribution of blankets and food, and assisting residents who had lost identity documents and immigration papers in the blaze. A local branch of a small Marxist opposition party were walking through the settlement registering people to specific sites and taking notes and photos of what people had lost.

Until the fire, which destroyed most of the homes, the informal settlement was largely invisible

By Sunday morning (two days after the fire) a man from the housing department arrived, accompanied by an entourage of flashing blue lights, police sirens and body-guards. He set up shop alongside the crisis-management tents, and a long and boring speech ensued about how the state has changed people's lives for the better and that they would rebuild people's shacks. By Monday, several officers from the housing department were seen walking through the settlement, mostly instructing people to tear down the structures they had rebuilt if they wanted to qualify for a new structure from the state. By Tuesday a fleet of construction trucks were on site tearing down structures and replacing them with structures made from cheap materials and without any option for customization. By Wednesday, after building five or six such structures, the trucks were not seen again.

Magic

Leslie Bank (2011) has written about fires in informal settlements in South African cities during the apartheid era — and the invisibility associated with these fires. In contemporary South African cities, it seems, such spaces remain outside of popular and official visibility, emerging only in the event of catastrophe in ways that confirm the negative associations. Yet despite the state's apparent disinterest, it remains a powerful imagination in post-apartheid South Africa. Residents were variously grateful or sceptical of the visibility they were receiving from the various news and charity organizations. But it is their visibility to the state that was of particular concern. As one man told me: "They must come and see how we are living, so that they might give us proper houses".

In a context where life and livelihoods are precarious, where people receive almost nothing from the state, it seemed to me curious that the imaginations of a subjectivity to the state would remain so powerful. As Bank (2011) argues material infrastructures, no matter how broken or obsolete, connect individuals to a broader social imagination, so that apartheid-built social housing — designed to segregate racial groups — becomes the basis upon which many poor communities make claims on the post-apartheid state for housing and basic services in a democratic era. Taussig (1997), in his book *The Magic of the State*, suggests that the imagination of the state as omnipresent pervades even ritual witchcraft practices. In the

same way, the fire that ravaged the informal settlement was thick with the imagination of the state, as that which both ignores, but also offers some sense of incorporation (see e.g. Secor 2007). The distance therefore, between the informal settlement and those spaces from which it is rendered invisible, is not that far. Both are part of a complex and intersecting field, in which the individuals attempt to shape the materiality of the city as a place of belonging.

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Io Squaderno 35

The Urban Invisibles

Edited by // Andrea Pavoni & Andrea Mubi Brighenti

Guest Artist // Aristide Antonas

Project // Antonas Office, The Open Air Office, installation, Avdi Square, Athens; 48 tables, 100 stools, 48 working lamps, 9 meters of bookshelves, a printer and a water cooler. Collaborators: Katerina Koutsogianni, Kristy Garikou and Alexis Georgiadis



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35

In the next issues:
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