

Architecture and Politics: The Ideology of Consensus Versus the Reality of Dissensus

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Keywords: politics in architecture; the political; police; post-politics

The rising tide of international political instability that inevitably drew with it the built environment led, in the last decades, to a growing interest in the subject of politics in architecture—from the implications of the global financial crisis to *Occupy*, or from the Arab Spring to *Nuit Debout*.

Architecture, by its nature, is implicated in the representation and construction of the public sphere, as well as in the private one. Architecture builds, shapes, the physical environment where our lives unfold. And by building this physical environment, architecture has also an important ideological dimension in defining what is to be considered as liveable, as the right mode of life, and in defining the spatiality of our existence. For Nietzsche, “in architecture the pride of man, his triumph over gravitation, his will to power, assume a visible form. Architecture is a sort of oratory of power by means of forms.”¹ So architecture has, and can be, an embodiment of power. As a profession, architecture has its own governmentality,² division of labor and relations of power. So it can be easily seen as involved in the more global governmentality of the city or the state. This conception of architecture implicates the profession in the construction of political consensus and deprives it of the possibility of disrupting predefined order and invent new ways to inhabit the world. Ironically, the more architecture is involved in politics, the less *it* is political. And this happens because when architecture becomes institutionalized, it fails to address the *polis*, conceived in the traditional Greek sense of the site of public political encounter and negotiation, the space of (often radical) dissent, disagreement and dissensus, the space where political subjectivization literally takes place.

In 2011 in an article entitled “Designing the Post-Political City and the Insurgent Polis,”³ Belgian geographer Erik Swyngedouw points to a climate of global consensus that has become pervasive over the past twenty years, effectively suppressing dissent and excluding most people from governance. He explains this consensus as limited to a select group (e.g., elite politicians, business leaders, NGOs, experts from a variety of fields) and perpetuated through “empty signifiers” like the sustainable / creative / world-class city. He argues that this consensus serves a “post-political”⁴

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols* (Hertfordshire, England: Woodsworth Edition Limited, 2007), 54.

2 Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality is the “art of government” understood as the ensemble of relations and forms of power. In other words, it is the exercise of a government over something or someone. For further readings, see Michel Foucault, *The birth of biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2008) and “On governmentality,” *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979): 5-21.

3 Erik Swyngedouw, “Designing the Post-Political City and the Insurgent Polis,” *Civic City Cahier* 5 (2011).

4 As the Belgian philosopher Chantal Mouffe points it, “post-political” perspective was based on Margaret Thatcher’s famous TINA (“There Is No Alternative”) doctrine, the conviction that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalization. From now on, the very possibility of contestation is rejected, and the distinction between Left and Right disappears. This is truly the highest stage of post-politics. If we can indeed say

neoliberal order in which governments fail to address citizen's most basic needs in order to subsidize the financial sector and take on grandiose projects designed to attract global capital. It is a governance regime concerned with policing, controlling and accentuating the imperatives of a globally connected neo-liberalized market economy for which there is ostensibly no alternative, while intensifying bio-political control and surveillance.

Architecture and urban design, as part of this new mode of urban governance, are increasingly framed in a common and consensual language of competitive creativity, flexibility, efficiency, state entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, collaborative advantage, and design-intensive acupunctural interventions.⁵ Swyngedouw adds that the flipside of management through limited consensus is rebellion on the part of the excluded, which he views as insurgent architecture and planning that claims a place in the order of things.

In Swyngedouw's paper, architecture and politics are clearly related. But an important paradox is to be noted: architecture can be a tool for consensual politics – architecture is politics – and, on the other hand, architecture can be a praxis that disrupts the predefined order of things by creating new spaces where the political debate can take place – therefore architecture is political. It is this paradox that this article will try to address: architecture as politics and architecture as political. How can architecture be political? To understand this paradox we will start by discussing the underlying logic that differentiates the concepts of *politics* (*la politique*) and *the political* (*le politique*), i.e., “political difference,” specifically in Carl Schmitt's and Michel Foucault's works, as well as in the post-foundational thought of Jacques Rancière.

In the second section, the depoliticised condition of the late capitalism will be explored, arguing that architecture as a profession has been thoroughly, and perhaps, fatally, infested by an institutional engagement and an ordering that is thoroughly *post-political* and *post-democratic*.⁶ This evacuation of the political turns architectural praxis into an ideology that represents consensus, implicated in neutralizing and depoliticizing the city by installing empty signifiers like “green architecture” or large scale projects like Grand Paris or Brussels 2040.

In the final part of the article, we attempt to recover the notion of the political and of a political architectural practice from the debris of contemporary obsessions with consensual (participatory) governing, technocratic management, and neo-liberal architectural polic(y)ing, by analysing the ways of dealing with conflict in contemporary architectural projects like “Reinventer Calais” de P.E.R.O.U.

politics (*la politique*) and *political* (*le politique*)

An exemplary case of the classical, (proto)liberal conception of politics is Hobbes' “Leviathan.” For Hobbes, the necessity of the institution of politics, in the form of sovereignty, results from the fear of “the state of nature,” i.e., the disordered social. The state of nature is the state of

that we are today living in “post-democratic” societies, that is because, with the triumph of neoliberal hegemony, popular sovereignty has been deprived of the scope which it used to enjoy. The post-political consensus only leaves room for the exchange of government between centre-Left and centre-Right, both of which serve the diktats of neoliberalism. All the parties that do not accept this landscape are dismissed as “extremists” and accused of endangering democracy itself.

- 5 See Patsy Healey, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Bob Jessop, “The Rise of Governance and the Risks of Failure: the Case of Economic Development,” *International Social Science Journal* 50 (1998): 29-46; Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Louis Albrechts, “Bridge the Gap: From Spatial Planning to Strategic Projects,” *European Planning Studies* 14 (2006): 1487-99.
- 6 On post-politics and post-democracy see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999); Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory*, 34, 6 (December 2006): 690-714. For a persuasive development of the notion of post-democracy, see Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004).

absolute, unlimited freedom, where one can do whatever one wants and is limited only by one's own, primarily physical, capacities. This makes life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"⁷: it is a life of contingency and conflict, without a guarantee (guarantor) of not only personal security, but any kind of social meaning. According to Hobbes, every individual's main concern is the struggle for power and, most importantly, self-preservation in peace; as a result of a lack of security, the fear of death becomes the major motivation for the social contract between all.⁸ The transition to the political from this disordered social life is not merely accidental, it is human nature and rationality that demand it. The political state is established by persons who give up their freedom in the face of the fear of death and "confer" it, together with their power, to a sovereign in exchange for protection, which results in centralization and accumulation of power in sovereign "hands." The establishment of the state fixes and codifies, as law, the circulation and exercise of power, which becomes solely the right of the sovereign. Interestingly enough, the very possibility of such an agreement requires the use of language, which means that the state of nature is not asocial. Nevertheless, in order to justify the necessary transition to the state, Hobbes seems to suggest that the state of nature is both a-social and a-political – in a sense that natural life is qualitatively different from the social life of the *polis*, that is, the good life. As a result of such a distinction, politics is reduced to the state, which is "designed" in order to close off the dangers of contingency and unordered, free flowing or circulating power. The very concept of politics thus becomes a guarantor of security, a tool for policing the borders of ordered social interactions. The thought of real conflict (as opposed to the state of nature as a rhetorical strategy, as in Hobbes) is repressed within the order of the state: the institution of sovereign regulation is assumed to have conclusively eliminated the dangers of conflictual, contingent, or non-political life.

Carl Schmitt was among the first to introduce a new understanding of the political (*la politique*) into the theoretical discourse of the 20th century. He situates his attempt at such a reconceptualization as a necessary way of salvaging real politics in "the age of neutralizations and depoliticizations."⁹ According to Schmitt, in the 17th century there occurred a shift in Europe from Christian theology to "natural" science. At the core of the shift lays "an elemental impulse that has been decisive for centuries, i.e., the striving for a neutral sphere," a sphere in which there would be no conflict, in which common agreement would be reached through debates and exchange of opinion. This trajectory can be traced within liberal narratives of a transition from the conflictual state of nature to the neutral sphere of the political state, which can be interpreted, in Schmitt's terms, as a deliberate depoliticization of reality, as a repression of the essence of the political. In his attempt at lifting this repression, Schmitt explicitly rejects the identification of the state with the political; in response, he not only re-introduces conflict into politics, but posits the "ever present possibility of [war-like] conflict"¹⁰ as the central principle of the political. More specifically, this antagonism is distinguished by the specific political distinction between friend and enemy, which is "the strongest and most intense of the distinctions and categorizations."¹¹

It is from this distinction between friend and enemy that Julien Freund will conceptualize the relation between politics (*le politique*) as essence, and the political (*la politique*) as circumstance. Politics is the essence to the extent that it appears as "by its origins consubstantial to society."¹² If there is society, there is politics, whatever society is considered, undifferentially of its people, time, history or geographical location. This essence of politics remains invariable in space and time, and unmarked by concrete realities – the existence of borders, the presence of an army, an economy, and so on. This autonomous politics finds a translation in the political, but this translation is contingent, marked by the historical, social or economic context of an era. It can change at any time to meet new needs, new expectations. It can constantly update itself.

7 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 78.

8 *Ibid.*, 103-06.

9 Carl Schmitt, "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations," trans. John McCormick and Matthias Konzen, *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought* 96 (1993): 130-42.

10 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 32.

11 *Ibid.*, 27.

12 Julien Freund, *L'essence du politique* (Paris: Dalloz, 2003).

Like Aristotle, Freund argues that man is by nature a political and social being. The political state, therefore, does not derive from a previous state: contrary to what the theoreticians of the contract assert, there has never been a pre-politic or pre-social “state of nature.” Being intrinsic to society, politics is not the result of a convention.

But that does not mean that it is an immobile or fixed notion. At the same time that it makes it possible to distinguish between the genera, the essence only defines the part of invariant existing in an activity called in concrete life to assume the most diverse figures. The political is always changing, but politics is always the same. Or as Freund notes: “If there are political revolutions, there is no revolution in politics.”

Another important point in Schmitt’s discourse on the political is that everything is political. By exposing the repression of politics in liberalism, Schmitt suggests that the political becomes a general domain. He writes that the fear of liberal depoliticization leads to the *exclusion* of the unpolitical from the political by positing the impossibility of its very being, but paradoxically this happens through an immediate politicization of this question, that is, *inclusion* of the unpolitical in the political through decision. It is clear for Schmitt that since everything is the political, any decision about something unpolitical is always a political decision; consequently, there can be no unpolitical as such: it is always a political product (and, paradoxically, a part of the very production itself), an illusion or the negative posited for a political purpose.

A radical change in the definition of politics underwent in the 1970s when the structuralist turned to a radical reconsideration of the nature of power.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault “defines” power in terms of relations of forces, which can be interpreted as the domain of the political, while politics is the result of coding and institutional crystallizing of this heterogeneity. Foucault writes that power must be understood, first, “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization”;¹³ second, as a process that includes its own reversal (permanence of struggle, resistance and freedom); third, as an interaction of different relations (e.g., in terms of support) that form a chain or a system; and finally, as “the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.”¹⁴ Therefore, what is conventionally called politics is now thought of as an effect and a strategy of representing the political: the “multiplicity of force relations can be coded – in part but never totally – either in the form of ‘war,’ or in the form of ‘politics’; this would imply two different strategies (but the one always liable to switch into the other) for integrating these unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable, and tense force relations.”¹⁵ The coding implies an integration of heterogeneity and an ordering of unordered, unstable and unbalanced forces. The political, then, is a realm of contingency and tension, while politics consists of the attempts to tame and represent the former.

To sum up, while the traditional understanding of power is related to a sovereign, a well-defined authority that owns the means of coercion, Foucault understands that power is not a substance that can be owned, conquered or held, but is rather *exercised*. It is not a property or privilege of the dominant class or any other group, but the overall effect of these strategic positions; it is a network of relations that merges the public and the private. Relations of power run throughout society; they do not only take place between the citizens and state. Power is omnipresent “because it comes from everywhere”; it is a complex strategic situation within a society. As a result, if the political is “signaled by the presence of any human relations organised by power [...] then it is inevitable that we would find the political everywhere today.”¹⁶ Foucault’s rethinking of power is what makes such a statement possible. Power is no longer seen as monolithic, rallied and operating from centres of command, but it became capillarized throughout the social body and

13 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. I (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92.

14 *Ibid.*, 92-93.

15 *Ibid.*, 93.

16 Wendy Brown, “At the Edge: The Future of Political Theory,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 75.

incorporated into the attitudes of each and every one in the form of injunctions to comply with the rules of the system. “In short, everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously *macropolitics* and *micropolitics*”¹⁷ as stated by Deleuze and Guattari. The interest of this segmental conception of society lies precisely in the fact that it makes it possible to think social phenomena, such as fascism, for example, at the macro-political level of parties, organizations, ideologies, but also at the micro-political level of society, our impulses, our attitudes and our daily behavior with our loved ones; but even more, to think of them indissociably as contiguous and permeable instances. The power of politics (or of the state if you will) no longer imposes itself as a transcendent and binding force on the social body of the nation, but it is the mimetic power that diffuses by propagation and contamination and makes a mass. It is therefore the modern separation between the private and the public, between the intimate and the political, which is called into question.

Within contemporary political theory there are a number of works dedicated to the concept of the political,¹⁸ many of them standing in opposition to each other or taking different approaches. Nevertheless, there are several traits that the majority of these works seem to share. These traits include, first of all, the conceptual split of politics into two interrelated domains, of *politics* (*la politique*) and *the political* (*le politique*), according to which the former is defined in terms of a limited, institutionalized sphere of politics and the state, while the latter is defined as the domain of contingency and possibility that can never be fully represented or captured within politics.

Another trait, that was not immediately present in Schmitt and Foucault, but that becomes prominent in the contemporary debates on politics, is the question of *difference*, as both a defining principle of the political and a principle that characterizes the conceptual relationship between politics and the political. It is not enough or even possible to think the political on its own terms; it is necessary to consider its conceptual relationship with politics. As a result, we must speak not of the political, but of “the political difference” – that endless differentiation and play between politics and the political. It is worth mentioning that the political is seen as something that ruptures, interrupts, punctures the ordered reality of politics or stirs up its sedimented practices, and thus it is a reactive concept.

Another commonality among contemporary attempts at thinking the political, is the shared “neutralization or sublimation thesis” (we saw it already in Schmitt),¹⁹ meaning that the conceptualization of the political is a way of asserting the authenticity and primacy of politics against the threat of depoliticization. As pointed by the Austrian philosopher Olivier Marchart, “according to this thesis [of depoliticization], the political becomes increasingly neutralized or colonized by the social... or sublimated into non-political domains.... The primacy of the political is not a triumphant but an endangered primacy – always in danger of becoming entirely closed up in the ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratized, technologized, and depoliticized society.”²⁰

In order to develop this conceptual split of politics into the two interrelated domains of politics and the political, Jacques Rancière’s conceptualisation will be discussed below.

In Rancière’s works there is an explicit assertion not only of the authenticity and specificity of the political, but also of its rarity. However, such a shift does not exclude the correlation that we observed in other theories: for Rancière politics is always in correlation with the order of the

17 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 213.

18 Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London and New York: Verso, 2006); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

19 It would be interesting to look at this thesis through the prism of Foucault’s critique of the “repressive hypothesis,” where “the political” would occupy a role similar to that of sexuality.

20 Olivier Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 44.

police, and a political event always irrupts into the state of the situation, as well as it makes the excesses of the state power visible.

In Rancière's early works on politics, we encounter familiar motives. For example, the "sublimation thesis" is represented by his critique of politics as "pacifying procedure," "the simple management of the social," and as "the art of suppressing the political."²¹ Politics is a procedure of self-subtraction and self-suppression through its reduction to the social and the elimination of passions; its main task is, paradoxically, depoliticization. This critique of politics as the suppression of the political is replaced, in the later works, by the concept of "the police" that is opposed to "politics proper." Rancière distinguishes between two modes or logics of being-together: one "puts bodies in their place and their role according to their 'properties'" and "distributes the bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility," and another "disrupts this harmony through the mere fact of achieving the contingency of the equality."²² The former is the order of the police, the "partition of the perceptible" whose principle is the "absence of a void and of a supplement,"²³ suggesting that it presents itself as the order of complete visibility, where everything is accounted for, where nothing escapes. The police is the set of procedures through which consent in society is achieved; it is the system of distribution of parts and, simultaneously, of the legitimization of such distribution. Politics has another logic: Rancière defines it as an activity "antagonistic" to policing, as acting on the police; it becomes manifest precisely as a disruption of the latter. It is referred to in terms of a break, an undoing, a disruption and inscription; it is bound up with police; it "runs up against the police everywhere."²⁴ Since there is no specific political object or issue, politics exists only as an act of inscription of "the apolitical structural vacuum of equality between anyone and everyone"²⁵ into the heart of the police order. Furthermore, "[p]olitics occurs when there is a place and a way for two heterogeneous processes [i.e. the police process and the process of equality] to meet."²⁶ As a result, it is a space of dissensus or, to be more precise, the very staging of such dissensus, the meeting place of the heterogeneous logics of police and equality. "The principal function of politics is the configuration of its proper space.... The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one."²⁷ One world is that of police, with its practices of emplacement and discipline; another world is that of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.²⁸ These worlds are in endless relation with each other, since, as Rancière maintains, order always succeeds the interruption of politics, that is, re-ordering. As a result of order always already being there, politics emerges only in correlation to it, as a disruption, as a re-partition of the perceptible, made possible by the inscription of a supplement, "of a part of those who have no part," that becomes visible through the assumption of radical equality (but precisely in this way marking the impossibility of that equality in the police order).

It is important to remember in this regard that Rancière is highly critical of the "everything is

21 Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London and New York: Verso 1995), 11

22 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27-28.

23 Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event* 5 (2001): thesis 7.

24 Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, 29-31.

25 *Ibid.*, 34.

26 *Ibid.*, 30.

27 Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," thesis 8.

28 By referring to the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being, Rancière points to and subsequently challenges the partition of the perceptible (policing) based on the Aristotelian distinction between *logos* and *phonè*. Here *logos* refers to "the articulate language appropriate for manifesting a community in the *aisthesis* of the just and the unjust," and it is opposed to the animal *phonè*, "appropriate only for expressing the feelings of pleasure and displeasure." (Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," thesis 8) The problem with this distinction arises, as Rancière points out, when one has to decide what counts as human *logos* and as animal *phonè*, resulting in political inclusion and exclusion respectively. The presupposition of equality of all speaking beings in their immediate access to *logos* as the ability to understand each other challenges the neutrality of Aristotelian distinction and provides the principle (equality) for politics.

political” thesis, which he associates with the Foucauldian equation of politics and power. For Rancière, the political re-partition of order is a rare occasion, while it seems that the police assume a more or less omnipresent, but not necessarily negative, role in his system – everything is the police unless it is politics, which is rare. In a manner similar to the above-mentioned theorists, Rancière advocates “proper” politics in opposition to the police, and the place of this principle of correlation at the core of his political thinking leaves him, as many others, blind to or ignorant of a possibility of the “third” mode of being-together that is neither a harmonious order of police, nor a contingent, disruptive reality of politics and equality.

Architecture and the depoliticized condition of late capitalism

For Rancière, “the end of the socialist alternative, then, did not signify any renewal of democratic debate. Instead, it signified the reduction of democratic life to the management of local consequences of global economic necessity. The latter, in fact, was posited as a common condition which imposed the same solutions on both left and right. Consensus around these solutions became the supreme democratic value.”²⁹

In this context of the implementation of consensual neo-liberal socioeconomic policies, architecture and urban planning has to adapt themselves to the consequences of socio-economic dislocation wrought by the reorganization of production and demand globally, the transnational networking of companies and individuals, the flows of global money, and the fast restructuring (and often dualisation) of labour markets. To meet the challenges posed by these new socio-economic realities, the polic(y)ing agenda of architecture and urban planning has been drastically redefined. The new agenda shifts away from classical ideals, like, for example, the vitruvian ones – *venustas*, *utilitas* and *firmitas* – towards the promotion of economic growth and competitiveness, entrepreneurship, creativity, capital gain and performance. This strategic turn on the architectural agenda is part and parcel of a critical reappraisal of the form, functions and scope of architectural practice and of the rise of a new mode of architectural governance based on the market and capital gain. While on a local scale, a variety of minor ways of practicing architecture may still provide for a great deal of differentiation, major contemporary architecture is increasingly framed in a common and consensual language of competitive creativity, flexibility, efficiency, state entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, and collaborative advantage, and ultimately green, energy efficient and sustainable. The late capitalist architectural and urban policy (or police) order, we maintain, is not only one that is predicated on the elimination of dissent, but more importantly, forecloses the political, evacuates “the partition of the sensible,”³⁰ and, through that, produces what Rancière, as well as Mouffe, Badiou, Nancy or Žižek, define as a depoliticised or post-political and post-democratic condition.

We can observe this post-political architectural policy in emblematic projects starting from the late 1980s, like Berlin’s Potsdammer Platz, Bilbao’s Guggenheim Museum, Masdar City, Grand Paris, Bruxelles 2040 or the new Dubai’s Louvre. This type of emblematic projects are the material expression of a development logic that views them as major leverages for generating future growth and attracting investment capital and consumers. In particular, such projects have become an integral part of neo-liberal policies to replace more traditional redistribution-driven approaches. They are the result of a hegemonic discourse that not only replaces but confiscates the public agenda to the extent that there is no room left for the redistribution.

The search for competitive redevelopment has become the leading objective of the new architectural polic(y)ing in an attempt to reassert the position of cities in the consolidating global economy.³¹ In a world in which more than half of the population lives in an urban environment,

29 Jacques Rancière, “Introducing Disagreement,” *Angelaki* 9 (2004): 3-9.

30 Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000).

31 Erik Swyngedouw, Frank Moulaert and Arantxa Rodriguez, “Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: large scale urban development projects and the new urban policy,” *Antipode* 34 (2002), 542-77.

enhancing urban competitive advantage is seen as largely dependent on improving and adapting the built environment to the accumulation strategies of a city's key elites and plugging the city into cutting edge transnational economic and cultural elite networks.

In this context, for French urbanist Paul Virilio, the politics of space (territory, resistance, urbanity), is replaced by the politics of time (transport, communication, speed, networks and flows). The cocoon-like interior and the atrium are capsules in a politics of time that rules a world with a minimum of bodily space. Space doesn't matter anymore; efficiency, connectivity, speed, are what matters, and this is the reason why dwelling space, urban space, cities, are becoming everywhere the same. Virilio's vision of the city is that of a place of speed and hence of violence, of migration – a transit zone. His vision is to put alongside starchitect's Rem Koolhaas diagnosis on the contemporary urban condition. What Koolhaas calls, in a text from 1995, "Generic City" is the product of a network and connected society and thus, to put it in Virilio's words, a result of the politics of time. Architecture and architects are part of this world wide network. In a later text from 2001 – "Junkspace" – Koolhaas writes that "the built product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace," and "architecture disappeared in the twentieth century."³²

Smooth, anonymous, repetitive, empty, dispersive, futile, laughable, encompassing, continuous, post-existential ... the description of junkspace is seized between dirty realism and interstitial delusion. The metropolis is endless, without streets, and without a way out. The architect is tired, devoid of his role, and continues to exist only as an embittered witness and disenchanted accuser. Can we say that this is the description of a post-political architect? The description of an architect that has *no alternative* but to accept the *in-transit* and therefore precarious contemporary condition? Virilio was the first to notice, in his book *L'horizon négatif* [The Negative Horizon],³³ the diffusion of the passenger-like condition. This contemporary condition shows the cultural effects of acceleration and continuous emergency state. Speed is not only the hidden face of wealth, or the origin of an unnoticed hierarchy, but also an unknown environment whose discovery remains to be made. For Virilio, violence is omnipresent. He sees the city as a transit zone, a place of speed, acceleration, migration and violence. If Koolhaas also remarks that the condition of passenger becomes universal, he fails to mention that this mobility (produced by what Virilio calls "speed vector" i.e. cars, trains, planes) also generates a form of violence. There is a big difference between what we can call "legal" migration and "illegal" migration, between arriving in business class or hidden in a container on a boat. The airport lounge and the nearby transit camp for illegal immigrants are worlds apart. But there is a convergence: the world's population is ever more subject to delocalisation, as are today's industries. This delocalisation is a source of violence, both because of the speed with which it is associated and because of attendant phenomena like exclusion, incarceration, collision, ghettoization, alienation, lack of rights, xenophobia. In this conditions, in Koolhaas' analysis, the absence of violence and urban protest is striking. The Generic City as the description of Junkspace ("the built product of modernization"), show a "sedated" urbanity, "an eerie calm," "a place of weak and distended sensations, few and far between emotions."³⁴ This "serenity" is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm. Neither problematic neighbourhoods and territories, suburbs, shantytowns, nor places for dissent and revolt appear. Why this lack? Our hypothesis is that this lack is introduced to conceal the violence contained in the narrative itself: architecture is not capable anymore of creating the *polis*: the spaces where political subjectivization takes place.

The description of Junkspace, where the narration becomes even more incisive, goes even further:

"Junkspace is political: It depends on the central removal of the critical faculty in the name of comfort and pleasure. Politics has become manifesto by Photoshop, seamless blueprints of the mutually exclusive, arbitrated by opaque NGOs."³⁵

By reducing public life to something like a trademark Public Space, contemporary architecture

32 Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *Obsolescence* 100 (2002), 175.

33 Paul Virilio, *L'Horizon négatif: essai de dromoscopie* (Paris: Galilée, 1984).

34 Rem Koolhaas, "The Generic City," in *S,M,L, XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998): 1250-51.

35 Koolhaas, "Junkspace," 183.

removes the unpredictable. For Koolhaas, politics has become entertainment, “the chosen theatre of megalomania.”³⁶

Koolhaas wrote these texts almost 20 years ago, but somehow they still seem valid. Alejandro Aravena’s Pritzker Prize and direction of the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale showed with even more acuity the problematic role of the architect today and the incredible capacity of capitalism to reappropriate any alternative narratives. Aravena’s work with his studio Elemental is well known for the social engagement and for the political statement that it was trying to make while designing a new way of dealing with social housing and the shantytown neighborhoods. By turning him into a starhitect, like Koolhaas, Foster, Gehry or Murcutt, the political position that appeared to be in conflict with major architectural and economic politics, was transformed into a consensual discourse in the hands of any politician, entrepreneur or businessman. *Reporting from the front* was finally nothing more than a commercial international fair.³⁷

When architects are only actors in a global capitalist society, architecture becomes an institutionalized practice, part of the late capitalist architectural and urban police order that forecloses (or at least attempts to) politicization and evacuates dissent through the formation of new forms of governmentality, of a particular partition of the sensible that revolves around consensus, participatory negotiation of different interests, and the acceptance of neo-liberal cosmopolitan globalization as the undisputable state of the situation.³⁸ Governmentality or governance refers to the institutional or quasi-institutional organization of governing that takes the form of horizontal associational networks of private (market), civil society (usually NGO), and state actors.³⁹ They provide for a much greater role in policy-making, negotiation, administration, and decision-making of private economic actors on the one hand, and parts of civil society on the other, in self-managing what until recently was provided or organised by the national or local state. These forms of apparently horizontally organised, rhizomatic, and polycentric *ensembles* in which power is dispersed are increasingly prevalent in rule making, rule setting and rule implementation at a variety of geographical scales. They can be found from the local/urban level (such as development corporations, ad hoc committees, stakeholder-based formal or informal associations dealing with urban, social, economic, infrastructural, environmental, or other matters) to regional scales and the transnational scale (such as the European Union, the WTO, the IMF, or the Kyoto protocol negotiations).⁴⁰ Such participatory modes of governance have been depicted as a new form of governmentality, that is “the conduct of conduct,”⁴¹ in which a particular rationality of governing is combined with new technologies, instruments, and tactics of conducting the process of collective rule-setting, implementation, and policing. Architecture, working at the urban scale, has been a pivotal terrain where these new arrangements of governance have materialised.⁴² This, so we argue, brings with it a transfiguration of the architectural practice in the direction of a post-political and post-democratic consensus. Ironically, the most *we* are under the impression that *we*, the civil society, have the power to decide, we fail to see how the instruments that should give us a voice are an integral part of the consolidation of an imposed and authoritarian neo-liberal police order, celebrating the virtues of self-managed risk, prudence, and self-responsibility. In sum, architecture as politics installs a new

36 *Ibid.*, 185.

37 The 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, “Reporting from the front” focused on the tangible effects architects can have on human and ecological crises. The Chilean architect, Alejandro Aravena from Elemental was the curator of this edition and intended with this proposition to stimulate the debate on the political role of architects in improving the quality of life in the built environment.

38 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005).

39 Erik Swyngedouw, “Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-state,” *Urban Studies* 42 (2005): 1-16.

40 Erik Swyngedouw, “Neither Global nor Local: ‘Glocalization’ and the Politics of Scale,” in *Spaces of Globalization - Reasserting the Power of the Local*, ed. K. Cox (New York: Guilford, 1997).

41 Michel Foucault, “On governmentality,” *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979): 5-21.

42 Patrick Le Galès, *Cities: Social Conflict and Governance* (Oxford: University Press, 2002); Neil Brenner and Neil Theodore eds., *Spaces of Neoliberalism – Urban Restructuring in North American and Western Europe*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

urban police order with a new “partition of the sensible,”⁴³ and a reworked distribution of places and functions arises.

Architecture and politics: the metamorphoses of dissensus

The new architectural governmentality vitally revolves around a consensual arrangement in which all those that are named and counted can take part, can participate, while excluding the others. While there may be conflicts of interests and opinions, there is a widespread agreement over the conditions that exist (*the partition of the sensible*) and what needs to be done, i.e. the creation of a competitive, creative, innovative, sustainable and global architecture. As pointed in the first part of the article, the post-political, consensual perspective is legitimised by the “no alternative” doctrine (no economic alternative in the late 80s and early 2000 and no ecological alternative more recently). If we return to Koolhaas and his statement that the architect is devoid of his role while politics has become a “manifesto by Photoshop,” this “no alternative” doctrine seems to be well incorporated. One can only ask: why do we still need architecture or architects? A way of answering this question is to look on how the profession chooses to deal with conflict. In classical examples of architectural theory, like Vitruvius’ *Ten books on Architecture*, the oldest theory on how cities should be organized as a coherent body, or Le Corbusier’s *Vers une architecture*, politics is replaced with design and the act of building, and the objective is to pacify, stabilize and avoid conflict. And this tendency is still present. By its task of building a liveable world, architecture is presented as the most powerful embodiment of the ideology of consensus. And this is a fundamental problem of designing the spaces for possible futures, today, when the spectre of the *catastrophe to come* haunts our present: if there is no space where today’s order can be disrupted how can new and unexpected alternatives emerge?

To understand why architectural theory sees primarily architecture as an ideology of consensus it is interesting to see why and when Vitruvius and Le Corbusier conceptualize this idea of architecture. Vitruvius dedicates his book to the Emperor Augustus at the end of a very tormented civil war that marks the passage from the ancient throne, from the Republic to the Empire. Le Corbusier writes and works in another hectic period, from the 1920s to the 1950s. His *Vers une architecture* first title was *Architecture ou révolution* - architecture or revolution. The conflict that is already implicit in Vitruvius theory of architecture is even more explicit in Le Corbusier’s one: architecture and planning are ways to avoid conflict by their embodiment of the ideology of consensus, but they are always facing the reality of conflict. In a later text from 1931, “La guerre? Mieux vaut construire” (War? Better to build) in PLANS 6 (1931) Le Corbusier exposed this problem in even more brutal terms: the act of building is the only alternative to war as an act of destruction. So by being trapped with the attribute of stability, architecture is presented as an ideology of consensus. But this is when architecture is understood as a profession, a discipline, a theory, with its division of labor, relations of power, and with its own re-presentation in the public sphere. Another dimension of architecture is one that always implies a spatial condition of a subject. In its more modest details, the most a-political element of architectural form addresses a spatial condition, and a spatial condition implies always an idea of the political. By framing space, even when it does not want to be political, architecture always addresses an idea of the political.

As stated in the first part of this article, for Jacques Rancière a proper political gesture is about enunciating dissent and rupture, literally voicing speech that claims, in the name of equality, a place in the order of things, demanding “the part for those who have no-part.”⁴⁴ For Rancière: “In the end, everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? [...], political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done to it.”⁴⁵

43 Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique*

44 Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” thesis 6.

45 Jacques Rancière, “Politics and Aesthetics: an interview,” *Angelaki* 8 (2003), 201.

Architecture and politics are eminently spatial, revolve around spatiality and temporality. As Rancière maintains: “Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise.”⁴⁶ “Politics acts on the police”⁴⁷ and “... revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”⁴⁸ *Proper* politics then is about reconfiguring space; to produce spaces of enunciation and speech which hitherto were only heard as noise: “The principle function of politics is the configuration of its proper space. It is to disclose the world of its subjects and its operations. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one.”⁴⁹ By re-configuring space, architecture can disrupt the police order and take part in the reality of dissensus. We can explain through two projects what kind of connection between architecture and politics is implied in the notion of dissensus: Tatlin’s Monument for the third International and P.E.R.O.U.’s *New Jungle Delire* in Calais.

Tatlin’s Tower, was a revolutionary project of fusion between architecture, politics and life. The abstract monument, in contrast with the other figurative sculptures that were part of Lenin’s plan for “Monumental Propaganda,”⁵⁰ had an open structure of iron and glass, which would reach a height of 400 meters and would straddle the river Neva in Petrograd. Not only would the tower commemorate the revolution, but it would also serve as the headquarters of the Third International, or Comintern. Each of the four internal glass volumes would house an agency of the Comintern, and would revolve at a different speed: the large cube was to hold its legislature, and would make one revolution per year; the pyramid, its executive, revolving once per month; the cylinder, its press bureau, revolving once per day; and the half-sphere at the top, its radio station, revolving once per hour. The utopian project was one of a new common life where architecture is the embodiment of the new communist life. Architecture sets the framework for the new world where all individuals and their revolutionary power are to be embodied and, at the same time, builds the sense of space: a perpetual movement towards progress represented by the oblique direction. But while embodying the notion of revolution, architecture installs a new type of order and police: one where there is no place for political dissensus because architecture, politics and life merge. Dissensus is embodied into a specific aesthetic form: the oblique direction.

In his 2007 installation at Tate Liverpool – The Fountain of Light – Ai Wei Wei, showed a miniature version of Tatlin’s Tower transformed, ironically, in a chandelier, an opulent accessory. This reappropriation of the initial architecture is interesting not only because it generates a confrontation between utopia and reality, but because it shows a displacement of our perception: architectural dissensus navigates between the material transformation of our sensible world and the internal transformation of our perception and conception of things. Tatlin’s monument was part of an aesthetic revolution that intended to build the material forms of a new way of life. The construction of this new life needed first the construction of its own visibility that materialised in the construction of an image: an anticipatory image of a world to come, that disrupts with the common perception. Wei Wei’s chandelier shows the consequences of this type visibility: the failure of merging architecture and life. To act politically, to give space for dissensus, architecture must act from its own distance to life.

The second project, *New Jungle Delire*, is a research based action of the French association P.E.R.O.U.⁵¹ that took place in 2015 and 2016 in Calais, France. The proposition was linked to several other actions and to an open call “Reinvent Calais” (*Réinventer Calais*). The collective,

46 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

47 *Ibid.*, 33.

48 Rancière, *The Politics of the Aesthetics*

49 Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” thesis 8.

50 Monumental Propaganda was Lenin’s campaign to remove monuments reflecting the tsarist period from Soviet streets and to replace them with new ones informed by the ideas of the incoming regime.

51 P.E.R.O.U. – Pôle d’Exploration des Ressources Urbaines (The Urban Resources Exploration Center), created on October 1, 2012, is conceived as a research-action laboratory on the hostile city. Composed

composed of architects, artists, theorists in several domains and citizens acting in concert, has tried to displace the way the public opinion and imaginary looks upon this space. The idea was to envision this New Jungle as a city to come, not as a residual space occupied by errants. The architectural act becomes a political act in this example because architecture keeps its distance from life and doesn't try to install a new order. The project is one of a subversion of the normal distribution of spaces and places: a strategic vision of the connection between architecture and politics where architecture is not a power organising space, but a space where the power of life can exercise its dissensual nature. New Jungle Delire is also an ironic response to the retroactive manifesto for Manhattan – *New York Delire*, the French translation for Koolhaas' 1978 book *Delirious New York* – where the author sees New York as the arena for the terminal stage of Western civilisation, and therefore of politics. P.E.R.O.U.'s action intended to disrupt the major distribution of space in which the so-called "new jungle" developed on the edge of Calais,⁵² in a marginal territory of misery, wandering, indignity, violence and pain. The architects, urban planners artists, philosophers, sociologists, cartographers, historiographers, involved in P.E.R.O.U.'s action intended to open a space showing this territory as a center to come, suggesting that what is being invented is a metaphor for the 21st century "ville=monde," a multicultural metropolis where real alternatives are (still) invented.

Conclusion: dissensus as part of the very nature of the *polis*

In this paper we addressed the paradox of politics in architecture by introducing the underlying logic that differentiates the concepts of *politics* (*la politique*) and *the political* (*le politique*). We outlined this paradox by observing how the profession chooses to deal with conflict, with dissensus, in order to design the *polis*, the site of public political encounter and negotiation, where political subjectivization literally takes place. While trying to install consensus, architecture sets the distribution of spaces, places and functions, thus becoming a tool for hegemonic discourses. The late capitalist architectural and urban policy (or police) order appears as not only one that evacuates dissensus, but more importantly, forecloses the political, evacuates "the partition of the sensible," and, through that, produces what Rancière, as well as Mouffe, Badiou, Nancy or Žižek, define as a depoliticised or post-political and post-democratic condition. Architecture as a tool of governance, as politics, addresses another issue: the power relations. Powerful men have always inspired architects; the architect has always been influenced by the authority. Friedrich Nietzsche's famous aphorism perfectly summarizes the ambivalence of the relationship between architecture and politics and, more precisely, between architecture and political power. While the spaces we inhabit are undoubtedly a reflection of who we are, we are also influenced by the places we inhabit, and architecture is a shaping tool of the common space. Consequently, architecture is an eminently political art and one that interests "the powerful" to the highest degree, notably for reasons of prestige and representation — which is well known — but for deeper reasons too. The architect often likes to be courted by the powerful, or even succumbs to their temptation — Nietzsche's aphorism seems to (at least) insinuate that the reciprocal attraction of the architect and the man of power must be put under probation.

Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek writes: "In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by a collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists, ...) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. The political (the space of litigation in which the excluded can protest the wrong/injustice done to them), [is] foreclosed ... It is crucial to perceive ... the

of researchers, artists and architects, its actions revolve around the concept of hospitality, especially in collaboration with people in precarious situation.

52 In June 2015, 3000 people lived and built this territory including, as stated by P.E.R.O.U., a school, a hospital, supermarkets, a nightclub, churches, mosques, dwelling types from all over the world, but also multiple languages, multiple and endless dreams and a political representation embodied in a "Conseil des exilés" meeting once a week.

post-political suspension of the political in the reduction of the state to a mere police agent servicing the (consensually established) needs of the market forces and multiculturalist tolerant humanitarianisms.”⁵³ Is architecture today only a tool for neo-liberal governing? Or can architecture still be a practice that aims to construct political antagonism in the city, rather than mask it, and to represent agnostic claims to the city rather than presenting architecture as the solution to a problem? Can architecture be *political*?

In the last part of this paper we tried to respond to this questions, first by recovering the notion of political architecture, by understanding dissensus as part of the very nature of the *polis*, of urban life. Architecture, we maintain, can be political by taking part in the reality of dissensus. This happens when architecture’s re-configuration of space disrupts a pre-defined and policy-ruled order. Projects and actions, as P.E.R.O.U.’s *New Jungle Delire* in Calais, are on the radical margins that are an essential part of twenty-first century democratic urbanity. And it is exactly these practices that urgently require attention, recognition, and valorisation. They demand their own space; they require the creation of their own material and cultural landscapes, their own emblematic geographies. These are the spaces where the post-political condition is questioned and alternatives are experimented. Such experimentations “modify the map of what can be thought, what can be named and perceived, and therefore also of what is possible.”⁵⁴ This re-centring of the *polis* as the space of dissensus and disagreement, with its places for enunciating the different and the staging of the voices of those unheard or unnoticed, is exactly the site from where proper urban democratic politics emerge.

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53 Slavoj Žižek, “The Lesson of Rancière,” in *The Politics of the Aesthetics*, ed. Jacques Rancière (London: Continuum, 2006), 72.

54 Jacques Rancière, “Les territoires de la pensée partagée”, accessed Aug 1, 2018, <https://www.espacestemp.net/en/articles/jacques-ranciere-les-territoires-de-la-pensee-partagee-en/>.

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