PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS

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The Arabic term *al masha* refers to communal land equally distributed among farmers. Masha could only exist if people decided to cultivate the land together. The moment they stop cultivating it, they lose its possession. It is possession through a common use. Thus, what appears to be fundamental is that, in order for this category to exist, it must be activated by common uses. Today we may ask if it is possible to reactivate the cultivation of the common, expanding the meaning of cultivation to other human activities that imply the common taking care of life. The Arab Revolts that started in 2010 have shown various ways in which al masha can be reclaimed and reactivated. Al masha is different from "the public." The state apparatus mediates the existence of the public, whereas al masha exists beyond state institutions. The public is a space that is given to people by structures of power, whereas al masha is a space created by the interaction of people. Public space can exist without people. Al masha only exists if people are constantly producing it.

AL MASHA/COMMON

The border is not a line. It is a space with depth. The materials it is made out of are the same as those of cities, just used differently; a retaining wall made out of reinforced concrete serves as a barricade. Inside the border, the rules are few, but essential. All flows are strictly monitored and controlled. The border is a machine that tears apart everything that crosses it, both objects and people, into separate, classifiable elements, only to put them back together again, in one way or another, when they exit. The border machine is interactive architecture. It changes depending on the citizenship of the person who crosses over it. As a prototype of biopolitical architecture, maybe in its purest form, the border becomes more or less porous depending on the nation it belongs to. A regulating device that mediates between birth and nationhood, it constructs and deconstructs itself depending on the relationship that each individual has with the state.

BORDERS

Refugee camps should not exist: they represent a crime and a political failure. For over a century, the social and political experiments that are the camps have not remained confined inside their walls and fences. They have contaminated and undermined the Western notion of the city as a civic space in which the rights of citizens are inscribed and recognized. Camps are established with the intention of being demolished. They are meant to have no history and no future; they are meant to be forgotten. The history of refugee camps is constantly being erased, dismissed by states, humanitarian organizations, international agencies, and even by refugee communities themselves in fear that any acknowledgment of the present undermines their right of return. The only history that is recognized within refugee communities is one of violence, suffering, and humiliation. Yet life and culture in the camp exists, and should be understood, beyond suffering and marginalization.

Foucault tells us that we live in a confessional society. We like to be interviewed, our dreams to be known, our past investigated, our biographies written, our faces photographed. The confession, once a practice confined to churches, is today prevalent throughout society. There is no need for a priest to confess our sins. With confession, there is automatic absolution.

CONFESSION

After the Second World War, decolonization emerged as a powerful cultural and political process to liberate many countries from direct European colonial control and reshape power relations. It was a moment of great hope, but also great disillusionment. Architecture plays a crucial role in the processes of both colonization and decolonization: in organizing spatial relations, expressing ideologies, and serving as evidence for political and cultural claims. The analysis of the ways in which colonial architecture has been re-utilized is a new arena for understanding broader political and cultural issues around national identity and exile, senses of belonging and alienation, and mechanisms of social control and urban subversion. Decolonization is the starting point to understanding the globalized present and the associated conditions of exile, displacement, migration, revolt, and struggle against oppression, with which a convincing conceptual vocabulary can be produced and exercised in today's struggles for justice and equality.

Rather than being in a constant state of postponement—delaying action until a particular time has come—exile can be mobilized as an operational tool to transgress borders and forced dislocation. Exile and nationalism both stem from and respond to the same modern condition of alienation and its subsequent search for identity. Whereas nationalism tries to create collective identities of belonging to an imagined community, a political community of exile is built around the common condition of non-belonging, of displacement from the familiar. As a political identity, exile opposes the status quo, confronts a dogmatic belief in the nation state, and refuses to normalize the permanent state of exception in which we live. Exile demands to be thought as a radical, new foundation for civic space.

For some, heritage freezes time, space, and culture, reducing buildings to spectacular objects for contemplation and consumption. Yet conservation also pertains to the contested space in which identity and social structures are built and demolished. Heritage has become a battlefield where the understanding of culture, history, and aesthetics has been and continue to be reshaped. Who has a right to define what constitutes heritage?

HERITAGE

In order to be accepted in foreign countries, refugees are expected to constantly perform the role of the "perfect guest." Access to public space is thus a challenge. Turning private spaces, such as the living room, into social and political arenas, is often a response to this limitation of political agency in the public realm. Located between the domestic and the public, *al madafeh* is the Arabic term for the room dedicated to hospitality. It is the part of the private house that has the potential to subvert the relationship between guest and host, and give different political and social meanings to the act of hospitality. Al madafeh opens itself to the foreigner, the outsider.

MADAFEH/HOSPITALITY

How can we live, express, interact, think, and converse beyond professional terminologies, academic categories, and the logic of institutions? For Munir Fasheh, *mujawaara* is a form of organization without hierarchy. Mujawaara is a medium of learning. It is a basic ingredient in stitching together the social, intellectual, and spiritual fabric of communities. Mujawaara embodies the spirit of regeneration in the most important aspect of life: learning. It demonstrates that another vision of education is possible.

Participation in refugee camps or informal settlements is often understood exclusively through the lens of relief, and architecture as a tool to react to immediate needs and emergencies. This frame establishes asymmetrical relationships between organizers and the participating community, reducing them to "relief recipients" who should be grateful and endorse the attempt of those who are there to help them. In order to challenge this asymmetry, participation needs to operate as a tool to negotiate conflict within different sectors of the community. "The community" is often perceived as one solid entity in need of help and support. Such conceptions do not permit practitioners to effectively engage with "communities" themselves and their different power structures, needs, and agendas. Participation is about finding a new balance between existing power structures. Participation should not escape conflict if it aims to redistribute power.

Giorgio Agamben proposes the idea of "profanation" as a strategy to restore things to common use. To profane does not simply mean to abolish or cancel separations, but to learn to make new uses of them. To profane is to trifle with separation lines, to use them in a particular way. If to sacralize is to separate—to bring common things into a separate, sacred sphere—then its inverse is to profane, to restore the common use of these things. Decolonizing architecture, therefore, does not only mean to dislocate power, but to use its destructive potential to reverse its operation and subvert its uses. It is, accordingly, important to distinguish between secularization and profanation. Secularization leaves power structures intact; it simply moves from one sphere to another. Profanation, instead, manages to deactivate power and restores the space that power had confiscated to common use.

Contemporary cities and territories have often been described as fluid spaces, without borders, lacking any exterior, and continuously traversed by flows. Interconnected global cities form an autonomous transnational space. There exists a rhetoric and an imaginary tied to globalization, to this new freedom of movement, and to the elimination of distances made possible by new electronic and mechanical infrastructures. These representations of the urban and territorial reality literally implode when things fail to work as they are supposed to, when something goes wrong. The system of representation thus plunges into crisis, revealing all its inadequacy.

The notion of "return" has defined the diasporic and extra-territorial nature of Palestinian politics and cultural life since the Nakba. Often articulated in the "suspended politics" of political theology, it has gradually been blurred in the futile limbo of negotiations. Return is a political act that is practiced in the present as well as projecting an image into an uncertain future. "Present returns" thus ground an ideal in present day material realities. These practices necessitate the adoption of a stereoscopic vision that navigates the complex terrain between two places—the space of refuge and the destroyed site of origins. Both are extraterritorial spaces, not fully integrated into the territories that surround them. The former is defined as "absentee property," and the latter as a "United Nations run area," a sphere of action carved out of state sovereignty. Refugee life is suspended between these two sites, always double.

Opposition to the normalization of life in the camps and the resistance to settling *(tawtin)* has shaped the experience of refugees for decades. Palestinian refugees have always opposed any assimilation into their surrounding cities, fearing that their right of return might be undermined. At the same time, host governments have opposed normalization in fear of having to deal with the integration of thousands of people, often perceiving them as a threat. Both of these approaches are based on the assumption that as long as refugees are living in horrible conditions, their suffering would put pressure on the international community to enact their right to return. But forcing refugees to live in limbo and destitution has not brought them closer to returning. Why should better living conditions and access to rights in their host countries necessarily undermine the right of return? Today, refugees are re-inventing social and political practices that improve their everyday lives without undermining the exceptionality of the camp. Camps have become semi-autonomous zones where different social, political, and spatial structures have emerged; a fragment of a city yet to come.

PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS

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Since their first work, *Stateless Nation* at the Venice Biennial in 2003, and throughout their more recent architectural interventions in refugee camps, the artistic practice of Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti has explored and acted within and against the condition of permanent temporariness that permeates contemporary forms of life. In their ambitious research and project-based practice, art exhibitions are both sites of display and sites of action that spill over into other contexts: built architectural structures, the shaping of critical learning environments, interventions that challenge dominant collective narratives, the production of new political imaginations, the re-definition of words, and the formation of civic spaces.

This book is organized around fourteen concepts that activate seventeen different projects. Each project is the result of a larger process of collaboration and is accompanied by individual and collective texts and interviews that contextualize and expand the reach of every intervention. Contributors to projects and texts include Maria Nadotti, Charles Esche, Robert Latham, Salwa Mikdadi, Eyal Weizman, Okwui Enwezor, Munir Fasheh, Grupo Contrafilé, Murad Odeh, and Rana Abughannam. Edited by Maria Nadotti and Nick Axel.

AL MASHA/COMMON   MADAFEH/HOSPITALITY

BORDERS   MUJAWAARA/NEIGHBORING

CAMP   PARTICIPATION

CONFESSION   PROFANATION

DECOLONIZATION   REPRESENTATION

EXILE   RETURNS

HERITAGE   TAWTIN/NORMALIZATION

PERMANENT
TEMPORARINESS

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