

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THEORY Arindam Dutta

Prior to the “liberalization” of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, criteria as to what constituted “culture” depended on a loose contract between state institutions and a select smattering of artists and cultural practitioners close to these institutions, both of them generally liberal—even vanguardist—in outlook; together they were responsible for whatever grants, appointments, favors, or awards that stood for institutional recognition. The occasional disagreement or controversy over censorship or political nepotism kept up the impression, broadly speaking, of a state oriented toward modernization and modernism, and therefore one whose agendas civil society could, or should, actively support. For instance, in the Hindi film industry, there were two awards, one state-directed, the other commercial—reflecting India’s “mixed economy” model—both of them instituted, oddly enough, in 1954.

There were the National Film Awards, juried by mostly auteurish filmmakers and intellectuals, thus casting the Indian state somewhat in the Malrauxian mold; from the commercial side, there were the Filmfare awards, sponsored by the Times of India group, more echoing popular taste and financial success in the market. For some forty years, one could argue these two formats produced a kind of happy complementarity, if not complicity, holding up an ideological mirror to the planned “mixed economy” model and the presumed cohabitation between liberal state and protected market, officialdom and commerce. The National Awards tended to reward particularly grim, badly lit but soul-searching art-house cinema, offering up something like a national conscience in its explorations of class disjunctions, gender, caste, and so on and so forth. At the Filmfare Awards, sappy, melodramatic performances were prized above self-consciousness about formal style. In the resonance and dissonance in the yardsticks implicitly posed by these two formats, Indian moviegoers could sense something like the dialectic of modernity in operation, a radical modernity, ironically promulgated by the state, and a conservative modernity representing the interface between a protected market and an equally coddled civil society.

That dialectic held well until the mid-1990s, when television broadcasting was first deregulated in India. Within a few years, the market was flooded with new entrants—including Rupert Murdoch’s Hong Kong-based Star TV. With all that added airtime, competition over audience attention became much more pressing than the old days, when people were more or less forced to accept whatever fare was on offer when they tuned in to India’s single state-owned channel, Doordarshan. Generating new content was key, something that the older apparatchiks had, oddly enough, been better at, and soon all the newly launched private television channels were falling back on the film and celeb industry to fill up airtime and attract eyeballs. Television companies noted that each time one of the film award ceremonies was held, television viewership went up significantly. So they figured, what if, rather than waiting all year for the one prestigious event, there were several of these events throughout the year, each one sponsored by a different television network? Think, instead of just the Oscars and the Golden Globes, an NBC film awards, a CBS film awards, an ABC version, a Sci-Fi channel version, and so on. What they further surmised was that audiences didn’t particularly care who the prizes went to—what they were more interested in were the performances—dances and comic skits, etc., by sundry film stars and starlets—interspersing the award announcements.

Today, every media organization thus hosts its own version of film and television awards, which are more performances than they are awards. Award shows actually pay certain actors to show up and perform at the awards, and whoever shows up gets an award. The songs and dances do not serve as digressive relief pacing out the suspense and critical import that one might find watching a show as the Oscars, rather in today’s film award show in India, songs and dances are the show, with the awards offered as a digressive relief that in the end nobody cares about. Even more important, media conglomerates who had stakes both in film and television figured out that these faux awards presented something like a marketing opportunity; so, in effect, many of these ceremonies were occasions for corporations

to give awards to their own products. The Filmfare and the National Film awards still exist, but who cares nowadays what a select bunch of apparatchiks or hoity-toity film critics might think? The rubric of judgment had inexorably moved from being ensconced within a so-called “competent” circle of critics who held the reins of official approbation to one of market attraction or persuasion.

It is tempting to compare this surge in “awards” to the recent global surge in “competitions” in architecture. Although the phenomenon as such is not new, fewer and fewer competitions today refer to any actual site where anything has the prospect of being built: More and more of them are about generating “ideas” about this or that fanciful future, where this or that firm or industry uses the competition as a market venue to effectively generate ad copy whose intention is to garner media attention. An energy company hosts a competition to design sustainable cities; a car company hosts a competition to imagine the future of mobility. The trick here is to generate responses that appear to come from society at large rather than one initiated by the industry in question. The media reports will read, *here is what the world’s smartest architects are thinking of in terms of the future of mobility*. The sponsoring industry will be noted in passing, enough to stick in the brain, but innocuously enough since the report will be in the “culture” section.\* Alternatively,

real estate developers will use this attention to secure clientele and finances for a project that will inevitably veer away from the vague program stated in the competition brief.

In the United States and Europe, for the more or less struggling offices that flock to these competitions to generate the flood of ad images for free or for next to nothing, these

**\* Architects appear to be quite aware of this sham economy: Take, for instance, the following commentary in the *Architect’s Newspaper*: “... the evidence is building and the case becoming clearer: The competition industry in the U.S. is having equally as bad or worse effects on the conception of architecture than we already know it has on the business of architecture. The old argument that competitions drive architectural innovation is no longer credible. Developers, cultural institutions, and government agencies have mastered the use of design competitions as publicity campaigns. Their claims of**

“prizes” or “honorable mentions” are crucial to supporting not so much the promise of higher fruit in the future but rather adjunct or junior careers in academia where other “objective” forms of validation are lacking. Sooner or later, these “ideas,” winning or otherwise, will find their way into appointment or promotion portfolios. What is ad copy in the first instance has now become academic materiel, sitting alongside math formulas, scientific papers, art history monographs, and literary critiques, awaiting valuation and accreditation on the desks of university administrators. Today, these “ideas” are, in the eyes of the university, architectural knowledge.

Think of the Ordos 100 project, curated by the artist Ai Weiwei (with the requisite “dissident” credentials) and Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, in effect an effort by local real estate developers and land barons to use the “creative clout” generated by an international cadre of designer participants to effect a brazen land grab. If Ordos 100 is today a ghost town, its reality, in fact, lives on in the portfolios of dozens of architects in prestigious architecture schools for whom this validation—i.e., recognition by the celestial judgments of Ai Weiwei et al—stands in as criteria for professional accomplishment. In future years, if one went into the archive of American institutions, you would see these buildings appended in portfolios as evidence of competence, as attesting to various promotions or appointments to professorships, chairs of departments, and so on. I hope you see where I’m going here: The “economy” of academic judgment is not very different from hack television shows that portend to hand out awards on histrionic excellence.

**searching for the best ideas is just an alibi that unfortunately continues to seduce too many of our best talents. These drawn out exercises also make very little practical sense when it should be easy enough for clients to choose between architects... by picking up a few monographs or even just looking at their websites. The real justifications are simple. Developers and institutions gain fantastic and relatively affordable publicity from the mad traveling circus of design competitions. By helping them attract financing and donors, we encourage the proliferation of these sham exercises where enormous projects are fully rendered without contracts, necessary approvals, or even clear programs.**<sup>1</sup>



**Site model for the Ordos 100 competition, with individual houses from the selected architects, 2008**

How do we evaluate Ordos 100, then, this Chinese encyclopedia of disparate strange objects whose secret code lies in the tricks surrounding the expropriation of land? As bogus real estate speculation riding on the coattails of international artistic reputations to bring name-recognition to its backers? As yet one more node in a global circuitry of roving curatorships, as a sign of a curatorial opportunism, if not desperation, to secure one more site of curation and therefore bring a kind of facticity to the act of curation as a crucial cog in the wheel of “creative economies” and real estate speculation? As the architects’—a self-anointed avant-garde in the most conventional role, chasing employment benefits—continued incomprehension of reality even at the very cultural moment that they all profess to be embracing reality (“the West is over, and along with it, modernity... Asia is where it’s at...”) Or is this in fact the new reality or new normal for a self-proclaimed architectural avant-garde, in which a mix of curatorial networking and academic buzz promulgates largely paper careers that on the other hand inveigh against paper architecture per se, in the name of embracing “practice” (or should we say the post-theoretical)? Which is to say, the utopia of anti-utopianism?

Which brings me to the question of our conference today, the “urgencies” of theory. I don’t know what theory is. I would only say this: If there are theories, they are to be found not only in the books of a Badiou or Derrida, but theory is what is embedded in the most mundane of statements, whether this be marketing ads, journalistic reports, weather forecasts, stock options, legal settlements, wedding vows, mowing the lawn, you name it. That is to say, in the context of institutions such as universities, theory does not reside only in those sound perturbations or marks of ink that we call words, spewed by that category of epistemic bureaucrats that we call professors. Theory is inherent in the acquisition of land, committee deliberations, investment, recruitment and fundraising patterns, hiring patterns, salary and benefits packages, the making of buildings, apportioning of spaces, and so on and so forth, the totality of which we call a university.

Theory is always contingent upon a situation. To the extent that we believe that conferences such as these—or the people in these conferences—determine what theory is, we are not only actively obfuscating the various sites and vectors in which theory operates in a university, in fact we are also obfuscating what universities do, what they are about. Universities are not centers of knowledge production any more than a corporate board meeting or a farmer’s field in Bangladesh are centers of knowledge production; what they are, in fact, are gambles for institutional validation. What we identify as “theory” within universities reflects a certain dispensation of governments and the division of various kinds of competencies with regard to various kinds of knowledge, a dispensation owed to the long legacy of German idealism in the history of modern nation-state formation, but now in headlong retreat.

To say that the university is defined by the quest for knowledge is to suggest that the price of money is determined by the value of gold. Let me restate this, just to be clear: To speak today of the “neoliberalization” of the university, of the “golden days” of the “liberal” university, is as kooky an idea as the wish to revert to the gold standard as a defense against present-day

capitalism. To speak of knowledge production in the university in the Kantian idiom of disinterestedness, at best this amounts to explaining one fiction by recourse to another, of some resplendent “ground” upon which knowledge becomes transparent to itself. The humanist image of rational dueling has long served as a billboard for the university; academic culture has thrived on the idea that the university’s primary mission is to catalog and test the modes of judgment—“method”—by which compacts about knowledge or ethics can be determined.

Other than being flagrantly misleading—the university’s institutional power equally lends it to dogma, sinecurism, political manipulation, surrogate factionalism, exploitation, nepotism, concept-peddling, hobby-horsing, cabalism, not to rule out continuing feudal and neofeudal paternalism—burnishing that image today may well amount to historicist dogma, given that the two-century-old arc of the “modern” university is undergoing some major, if not unrecognizable, shifts. In the old, modern, exhortation, signaled by the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, knowledge legitimation more or less drew from the upside-down validity conferred on philosophy by Kant in *The Conflict of the Faculties*: The further one retreated from interest or the “subjective” senses, the better the acuity of the dispassionate system to be designed and deployed in confronting phenomena. Lyotard’s “Report on Knowledge” of 1979 had pointed to the already compromised stakes in the establishment of that system in terms of an innate conflict between the conception of the university as the house of knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) and as the house for training or practice, “in some ways reminiscent of the split introduced by the Kantian critique between knowing or willing.”<sup>2</sup> The postmodern university, in that sense, is defined by the exacerbation of the brief placed on the pragmatic outcomes of science and knowledge; its “symbolic capital” is being detranscendentalized into more mundane forms of extraction.

And yet, to view the contemporary shift solely in terms of the Kantian move—from a rubric of truth to a rubric of

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practice—belies the myriad ways in which forms of knowledge and the powers of the “imagination” are instituted, operationalized, and consumed in the world, and the ways in which the domain of the university is being gerrymandered to conform to these imperatives. No longer does the university retain a legitimate claim to disinterest, nor do the managers of factionalism or interest couch themselves in merely utilitarian or pragmatic propositions. Far from being an ivory tower, the contemporary university is the epitome of the hybridized ways in which interest and disinterest, epistemic legitimacy and paradigm-breaking, work together in the contemporary marketization of knowledge.

Just as gold appears as an objective determinant covering over the social contracts that determine monetary value, knowledge production might also be seen as a thing whose work is to mask the contemporary university’s burgeoning briefs and claims to influence. To quote Michel Foucault, “We have to produce truth in the same way, really, that we have to produce wealth, and we have to produce the truth in order to produce wealth.”<sup>3</sup>

It might be interesting to produce a taxonomy of the university’s many identities today:

- The university as short-term fiscal stimulus: Governments see universities as a site to build up knowledge assets in a global economy, in partnership with a host of private actors, as a way of conveying competitiveness in the techno-workforce markets. This is different from the logic of *long-term* stimuli—the “fate of future generations” and the “advance of humanity,” etc.—that has been the university’s traditional rhetorical brief.
- The university as tax haven: Contributions to university bodies offer corporates and wealthy donors an avenue for managing asset portfolios.
- The university as investor: Private universities hold large financial portfolios, which, along with employment

retirement portfolios, comprise large stakes in the financial markets, as insistent as any others on greater and greater returns to fund their growth.

- The university as real estate agent: In many cases, universities benefit from older gifts or grants in land as well as current exemptions on their land acquisition to rent or lease land assets on preferential terms to corporate bodies or affiliated real estate companies. (Cambridge University’s Trinity College is the third largest landowner in the United Kingdom; Cooper Union subsists on rents from major real estate holdings in New York City, including the Chrysler Building.)
- The university as advertising billboard: The humanist aura of the university affords multiple players a venue to burnish their market credentials by funding research initiatives or bursary programs or building projects. Energy companies sponsor the discourse on sustainability; defense industries sponsor programs in the study of peace and conflict, and so on.
- The university as incubator for new biocommodities: These commodities range from devices aimed at the management of pleasure (apps, games, etc.) to managerial techniques to security hardware to philosophical concepts to the engineered components of what Donna Haraway has called “Life@ Itself.”<sup>4</sup>
- The university as labor (sub)contractor: A vast pool of scientific labor, in the form of graduate students and post-docs, is made available by the disciplining modalities—the incentive to work toward a degree, a job, etc.—of the university as a pliable workforce. The professor’s right to fail the student makes her into the best subcontractor for industry’s effort to employ technoscientific labor.

- The university as a consulting firm composed of “experts” (as opposed to a professoriate): For contemporary capital, the figure of the professor often represents an intractable and inefficient body through which to relate knowledge and efficient decision-making. From thickening the layers of administration, to empowering students by recasting them as consumer clientele, to introducing new measures to test pedagogical efficacy, professors are less and less the front for knowledge evaluation. New EdX-type initiatives seek today to parcelize education into transmissible packets of facts and testable insights, crowdsourcing the points of learning, and doing away with the physical corpus of the teacher.
- The university as a captive market for biofinance: As tuition fees and bursaries are raised and at the same time desubsidized, students are expected to turn to private lenders to fund their education. At the macroeconomic level, correspondingly, the situation may be little different from the mortgage market in real estate that tethered the expectations of the last financial boom (and bust); financial players are entering the educational loan market with expectations that growth from higher levels of higher education warrants the higher amounts and number of loans. In the U.S., Sallie Mae is following in the footsteps of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae; in many cases, the two are linked as parents refinance their home mortgages at lower rates to fund their children’s education. On the one hand, this flood of cheap credit inevitably entails the further exploitation of education as a privatized profitmaking sector; on the other hand, the imperatives of investment-driven growth are turning universities into giant health care–education–real estate complexes, the new front for what we may term *biocapitalism*.

- The university as training mechanism for “soft power” and “people skills” (managerialism in place of the humanities): The financial premium therefore put on students to choose fields that will repay this outlay best and fastest will in itself have a tremendous impact on the future of the disciplines. At the very least, one can foresee a retrenchment in the post-WWII subsidization of the humanities, since more and more “research” in the university will rely on private and corporate funding and tie-ups for their subsistence. Already, this reliance is first and foremost on university budget-writers: A corporate-sponsored doctoral student in science and technology costs one-fifth of the outlay required for a student in the humanities. Among elite institutions, one can thus foresee the humanities as reverting to an old-style, Whiggish, “aristocratic egalitarianism”; non-elite institutions will talk up the humanities as necessary for communication skills, creativity, and “people skills.” “Soft power” will be the new mantra, in place of the old, idealist emphasis on “imagination.”\*
- \* **Countries across the world have redefined industrial and educational policies to accommodate these large, multibillion-dollar complexes that capitalize, or hope to capitalize, on these knowledge industries. Whether it be the “reforms” undertaken by the Blair-Cameron governments in the UK, the Bologna Process to establish a European Higher Education Area, or new policy initiatives by the UPA 1+2 governments in India, or Projects 211 and 985 undertaken by the Chinese government, these research-industrial complexes are seen as critical in economic competition between nations or regions. China overtook the U.S. in 2013 in number of patents filed, a development that has set alarm bells ringing within the Obama administration, as will, no doubt, the day when the former surpasses the latter in number of doctoral degrees granted.**

Does the above list look like what Ian Bogost has termed a “Latourian Litany”? Perhaps. But the brunt of the argument here goes against the faith that nonetheless resides in all of Latour’s writing: that a “parliament” can be assembled where heterogeneous phrase regimens can confront each other with

equanimity, conforming to some given agreement as to how to voice, or settle, disputes.

As for the status of the humanities, the fields most likely to harken to the “golden days” of the university, the fields most likely to sigh at the “decline of theory,” simply think of how much money it takes to train the average doctoral student in the humanities in institutions such as ours (MIT, Columbia, etc.): a half-million dollars per capita. We forget that the effort to shore up the humanities in the postwar era was also an ideological decision, no less “neoliberal” than the neoliberalism that we now declaim as a newly arrived antagonist that is now putting humanists out of jobs. In that sense, subsidies to universities were in keeping with a series of other equally unequal or uneven subsidies in other areas (agriculture, industry, pension funds, and so on) that governments today find themselves more and more unable to honor, or repay.<sup>5</sup> Why “unequal”? – you may ask. Then consider this: The average French cow earns \$800 a year, an income that is higher than 1.2 billion of the world’s poor. The cow’s “salary,” so to speak, therefore, must be seen as only one component in an entire chain of similar such salaries—including the paid-up philosophes at the Collège de France or the École des hautes études, who are charged by the French state to regurgitate the matter of the socius and generate “theory”/milk. When we think Althusser, Derrida, Badiou, Latour, we don’t think paid-up cows. It’s just that in modernity, a modernity that university professors never tire of espousing, the clericalism of the professoriate is perhaps the last to be defrocked.

In Mark Wigley’s dissertation book and articles published in the 1990s, he had brilliantly argued that this architectonic of the disinterested foundations of theory—as set out in the Kantian idiom—in fact amounted to something like a material supplement or mnemotechnical supplement in the form of the architecture of the library, tethering the vocation of the previously itinerant university to a supposed material core/a building, a centering action by architecture even as architecture, as a discipline, itself became sort of invisible or pushed to the margins, since it

belonged neither to the “verifiable” discourses of the sciences, nor purely to the “imaginative” territories of the arts.

Should we reconsider that supplement of humanism today, given that now all the vital architectural development of universities appear to occur at their peripheries, and that on the other hand, instead of knowledge production, universities are now declaring “design” as their core mission? We are experiencing, in both intellectual and material terms, an inversion of what Wigley had deduced in the high era of humanism. At MIT and Columbia alike, the buildings at the core are allowed to deteriorate. The elevator in my building hasn’t been changed for fifty years; you can think of Avery as somewhat suffering the same fate. The periphery of the university, on the other hand, is full of shiny new speculation, branded buildings, new Ordos 100s, that promise new and imminent epistemological revolutions every day, more and more fights undertaken to save the world, protect humanity, ensure peace within and between societies.



Fumihiko Maki and Associates, MIT Media Lab Building, Cambridge MA, 2010

The unchecked liquidity that central banks are injecting into the global financial markets today finds its way into a surfeit of “projects” for whose ad copy the “truth-criterions” spawned by universities are a natural ally. (Daniel Defoe had noticed a similar link between a sham “projecting spirit” and inflation at the turn of the eighteenth century, after the Bank of England had begun to infuse large amounts of liquidity into European markets, quite like today’s U.S. Fed.)<sup>6</sup> From the standpoint of the university, what is most important to grasp here is the manner in which funds routed to labs escape a disciplinary embrace. Indeed, such is their calling card: to break down disciplines in the pursuit of what they construe as “innovation.” To the extent that universities use labs as proxies to maximize their amenability to these multiple kinds of patronage, one can garner the extent to which the older model of humanism is now in peril. Each funding pitch claims to redesign a world. The result has been a complete disintegration of whatever went in the name of disciplinary thinking, in the direction of a relentless entrepreneurialism that now infects administrations, faculty, and students alike. Everybody aspires to a lab of one’s own. It’s like Virginia Woolf in the era of venture capital, in which one seeks not the subsidized freedom, the aunt’s bequest, to write as one ought, but rather a launchpad to pitch for funds that will tide you over till you pitch for the next tranche of funds. So this may be a question for today: How will architects cope with this new profusion of claims to design from fields other than architecture?

It is now quite conventional to state that architect’s claims to validity in practice do not rely on truth criterions. I am thinking of Jesse Reiser’s quite astute claim in *The Atlas of Novel Tectonics* that “bad science” could be the inspiration for good architecture just as well as bad. This is simply to say—in fact going back to old Kant—that there is no inherent relationship between verifiability and design: In the modern idiom, design comprises a negotiation rather between purposiveness and the “purposiveness-without-purpose” that is the aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> But this kind of epistemic insouciance—if we may call it that, it sounds better than “advice not to learn anything properly”—itself risks

being outdated if one considers that the truth criterion was in fact in the first place the outcome of a pattern of apportioning subsidies, or in what amounts to the same thing, a way of appointing committees and settling the boundaries between disciplines.

We could say that the pivotal science of the twentieth century, and the prime promulgator of the truth criterion, was the field of physics, whose aura was further bolstered by the sense that its representational models presented a phenomenology of nature as such. In the older ideology of funding, the era of Big Science, physics was logos, and logos was, in manner of speaking, physics. Today’s pivotal disciplinary science, by contrast, biotech, even if it delves even more deeply into the phenomenality of nature, cites no such impetus toward methodological reduction or methodological reconciliation. Biotech is, strictly speaking, not so much a discipline as an ongoing and ever-changing, if not transparent, composition of interests. I will not go into the tremendous organizational striations that go into the discovery, development, and final delivery of a drug to market. To create another litany, this would have to include, at the very least, a combination of big government and small government sops, the power of big pharma, intellectual property regimes, venture capital, large financial organizations, windfall-seeking hedge funds, the parcellization and outsourcing of research activities across transnational territory, the construction and reconstruction of legal subjects and biological definitions of the body, newly thickened strata of university administrators and deans, the cultivation of so-called star professors, not to rule out the active production, across these multiple terrains, of what we could call agnogenesis, the production of ignorance by dint of defending proprietorial knowledge, selective reporting of data, bogus claims, you name it. In the venture capital model, a product does not need to make it to market in order to be bought or sold to make money off of it. The mere rejection of truth criteria is therefore hardly adequate to understand the composition of commodity, of design. Capital is, at every stage, capital, ever and only incomplete, an endless valorization of its



parts without a teleology of the whole: the M-C-M' cycle can be realized in every unit of a presumed production function.

Architecture, has, of course, fully echoed this trend—the book that I edited recently, *A Second Modernism*, speaks to some of the complexities of the relationship between disciplinary imperatives and funded research in great detail.<sup>8</sup> But Wigley's thesis still somewhat holds, although in an inverse way: In an era of Total Design, the scientists and administrators within the state more and more style themselves as designers, while designers find themselves scurrying around for a professional model. This is what Jesse Reiser said about “bad science”: Its usefulness is to the scientists. Two (if not more) can play at that game. To put it differently, in an era in which bad science was the norm, would architecture survive?

A critical question to ask would therefore be: Given this tremendous organizational and geographical striation of what is today called knowledge-driven capitalism, what is the status of this new architectural evanescence at the periphery of the university? Another way of asking the question would be: What is the place of the university as a node of knowledge production in these circuits of data-driven capital? From what I can discern, I would argue that never has this connection between knowledge and the knowledge economy been quite so tenuous. All the university perhaps offers today is perhaps something like a territorial locale, a kind of prestigious address so that capital that is in fact located elsewhere can claim to play at domesticity. The university is now, only, and ever, a piece of attractive real estate, which is to say, real estate through and through—and we could say that the humanities are like an inconvenient piece of old, rent-controlled housing—that is seen to be more in need of either demolition or, alternatively, gentrification, which is to say its conversion into promotional copywriting for the new state of affairs. What will our traditional conceptions of theory make of any of this? Very little, I suspect, other than lament the loss of former subsidies by invoking truth criterions that it was itself theoretically devoted to demolishing.

1 Marshall Brown, “Kick the Architectural Competition Habit,” *The Architect's Newspaper* (March 6, 2014), <http://archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=7138>, accessed March 15, 2014.

2 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984, 2002), 32.

3 Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 25.

4 Donna J Haraway, “Maps and Portraits of Life Itself,” in Peter Galison and Caroline Jones, eds., *Picturing Science, Picturing Art* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

5 See Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, trans. Patrick Camillar (New York: Verso, 2014).

6 Daniel Defoe, *An Essay Upon Projects* (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1697).

7 See Arindam Dutta, “Design: On the Global (R)Uses of a Word,” in *Design and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2009).

8 See Arindam Dutta, with Michael Kubo, Stephanie Tuerk, Jennifer Yeesue Chuong, Irina Chernyakova, eds., *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the “Techno-Social” Moment* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

10 Lord Riddell, *Radio Times* (December 21, 1923), quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 5v., Volume I: *The Birth of Broadcasting* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1961), 15.

11 Dexter Purinton, "Radio...A New Architectural Problem," *American Architect*, vol. 146, no. 2,634 (June 1935): 68–76. An earlier article, "Engineering Problems of Radio Broadcasting Studio Design," had appeared in *American Architect* six years earlier (135 [February 5, 1929], 195–203), but it was much less comprehensive and mainly discussed the logistical organization of spaces in order to accommodate the needs of musicians, actors, producers, special effects producers, and so on.

12 Léon Conturie, "Maisons de la Radio," *L'Architecture française*, vol. 9, no. 77–88 (1948): 3–16 (quotation from page 3, my translation).

13 Purinton, "Radio...A New Architectural Problem," 70.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 As indicated in a captioned photograph from *Broadcasting: Broadcast Advertising*, vol. 16, no. 7 (April 1, 1939): 24.

17 See Kathryn E. Holliday, *Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 2012). On the firm's somewhat ambiguous attitude toward

technology—it served as "house architect" to AT&T and many other high technology firms from the 1920s to the 1950s—see in particular Stephen F. Voorhees and Ralph T. Walker, "The Machine and Architecture," in Charles A. Beard, ed., *Toward Civilization* (London, New York, and Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930), 213–231.

18 On Broadcasting House, see Mark Hines, *The Story of Broadcasting House: Home of the BBC* (London: Merrell, 2008), and Colin Reid, *Action Stations: A History of Broadcasting House* (London: Robson Books, 1987).

19 Friedrich Kittler, "Forgetting" [1979], trans. Caroline Wellbery and David Wellbery, *Discourse 3* (Spring 1981), 88–121, esp. 93. A wonderful recent book by Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), brilliantly explores this problem of the archive in chapter 4, "The New Permanent Record."

CATHERINE INGRAHAM: I'd be interested in one point of clarification from Keller and Arindam. In your treatments of the problem of "urgency," you both to some degree referred agency to some other domain outside of architecture. It takes different forms—financiers or deans or administrators or bureaucracies or other offstage influences. I was struck by Keller's brilliant responsiveness to the theoretical possibilities in those outside domains, which can be both malevolent and ossifying but at the same time creative and eye opening, and certainly instrumental.

If this is the case, it seems odd that we keep reestablishing and insisting on a place for theoretical action to be happening within the university setting and within architecture schools in particular. Maybe this even relates to John's work on wireless broadcast, in that it refocuses our awareness outside the myopia of disciplinary discourse. So I'm wondering if this is true—should we be looking at these kind of displaced agencies for our theoretical urgencies?

ARINDAM DUTTA: I'll just premise my response by giving sort of a two-sentence definition of agency as I see it. When we talk about an agent of the East India Company or an insurance agent, we never presume that they're acting in their own interests. If we think of ourselves as free, there is a constitution that mandates that we are free—so in other words, agency is always a carriage of some other agency that places us in its place, right?

For me, the point isn't necessarily to understand that one is an agent only in the sense that one is carrying a certain institutional impetus—that's neither controversial nor problematic. As teachers, we teach curricula which are meant to carry some broader discourse in the names of the professors, which is thoroughly within that sense of agency. The real problem is to understand that these agencies are historically bound through and through, and not to eternalize a particular moment of consensus that we may have been used to thinking. The idea is to understand that there is no de facto ground on which one can truly stand, and it is only from there that one can begin to talk about ground.

In that sense, there is also a broader shift in the status of the university, which is pretty definitive. If you consider that theory is grounded in the vocation of the humanities broadly speaking, we have to remember that prior to the Second World War, the humanities were more or less ensconced within the salons of the liberal elite. Who could afford to do humanities but the rich? I mean, Walter Benjamin was rich. We have to accept that. What we see in the aftermath of the Second World War is an institutional impetus towards the democratization of the humanities, premised precisely on certain ideological value chains that we've already talked about. All I'm saying today is that these value chains probably no longer hold, and therefore the humanities, or creativity, is being pushed into a certain kind of para-economic activity, which makes itself apparent in its everydayness. For me, that is

where theory must begin—at that ground where there is no ground.

KELLER EASTERLING: I was just trying to point out a split between what theory is saying and what it's doing—the dispositions that we impose on it that can permit or deny information, the ways in which it can erase the very thing that you're trying to create, and the ways in which it can give you all the information that you need. To model something like that in our architecture culture or in academia is potentially useful. Without being able to see that dispositional register, how do you deal with evidence in the world? I can't understand the political theater of Putin (or Putin and Snowden) just from the knowledge of their official statements. That's not going to help sort through the turns and shifting intentions behind what they're doing, which is so different from what they're saying. Theory can be evasive in the same way in the political theater of academia.

JOHN HARWOOD: One of the things that attracts me to this radio project is that while there's a ton of history written on the radio, it's all about what people were doing—who was singing what, who was giving what speech. If there's this divide between different dispositions of theory that produce different artifacts, in this instance we're contenting ourselves to this point with simply historicizing what a certain theoretical and political project would like us to worry about—which is Pevsner on the radio, and Benjamin's musings on the metropolis and "Enlightenment for Children"—and not the

artifice that produces these effects, which is intensely complex.

INGRAHAM: There's a perpetual need to recalibrate theory, if you can say that, by marking the changing agency of parties or entities or postures or dispositions involved. There's an abiding structure. We want to say that theories are modeled on evidence, and that evidence also makes use of theory—(happy bedfellows)—but at the same time, each has its own domain, and there's a sort of will-to-power on both sides. Architecture continues to talk about a spatiality, that somehow lies behind political events; as if it embodied the potential for moving beyond what we mean by “space” as a geometric idea.

DUTTA: We've been discussing this at MIT a little bit—are architects really invested in space? I pose this to my design colleagues. Whatever happened to the plan? Are plans still viable? I mean, that's one representation of space that does not always seem endowed with theoretical promise today. I'm not entirely sure that architects today are actually interested in space.

WIGLEY: I just want to observe that A through H was unbelievably eloquent. An inspiration.

HARWOOD: We even got through I.

INGRAHAM: Yeah, that's right, thanks Mark.  
[Laughter]

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## Biographies

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- BEATRIZ COLOMINA is professor of history and theory of architecture at Princeton University, where she directs the Ph.D. program as well as the Program in Media and Modernity. Her publications include Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media (MIT Press, 1994), Sexuality and Space (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), and Domesticity at War (ACTAR and MIT Press, 2007), as well as co-editing the volumes Clip/Stamp/Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196X-197X (ACTAR, 2011) and Cold War Hot Houses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy (Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).
- MARK COUSINS is director of histories and theory at the Architectural Association. He is a founding member and senior fellow of the London Consortium, and has been a member of the Arts Council. He has written on the relation of the human sciences and psychoanalysis and his publications include a book on Michel Foucault (with Athar Hussain), the introduction to a translation of Freud's writings on the unconscious, and his famed series of articles on "The Ugly." He has delivered the Friday Afternoon Lectures at the Architectural Association for more than thirty years.
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post-coloniality, the history of architecture and design, and the history and present of empire. He is also the editor of A Second Modernism: Architecture, MIT and the "Techno-Social" Moment, on the postwar conjuncture of architectural thought and linguistic/systems theories (MIT Press, 2013).

KELLER EASTERLING is an architect, writer, and professor at Yale. In addition to Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space (Verso, 2014), Easterling is the author of Subtraction (Sternberg, 2014), The Action Is the Form (Strelka Press, 2012), Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades (MIT, 2005), and Organization Space: Landscapes, Highways, and Houses in America (MIT, 1999). Easterling's essay "Floor" was recently included in the Elements exhibition of the 2014 Venice Biennale.

JAMES GRAHAM is the director of publications at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, where he also teaches and pursues his Ph.D. in architectural history. He is the founding editor of The Avery Review, a journal of critical essays on

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CATHERINE INGRAHAM is a professor of architecture at Pratt Institute who has helped formulate seminal debates in architecture over the past twenty years. She received

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MARK JARZOMBEC, professor of the history and theory of architecture, is the interim dean of MIT's School of Architecture and Planning. Jarzombek works on a wide range of topics from the 12th century to the modern era, with a particular focus on the history, theory, and philosophy of architecture. He has published the groundbreaking textbook titled A Global History of Architecture (Wiley Press, 2006) with co-author Vikram Prakash and the noted illustrator Francis D.K. Ching. He is the sole author of Architecture of First Societies: A Global Perspective (Wiley Press, 2013).

MARI LENDING is professor of architectural theory and history at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, and a

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SPYROS PAPANETROS is associate professor of architectural theory and historiography, acting co-director of the program in Media and Modernity, and a member of the executive committee of the program in European Cultural Studies at Princeton University. He is the author of On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life (The University of Chicago Press, 2012) and the co-editor (with Julian Rose) of Retracing the Expanded Field: A Conference on Art and Architecture

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(The MIT Press, 2014). He is currently completing a second personal book project titled World Ornament, examining nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historiographies of bodily and architectural adornment on a global scale.

FELICITY D. SCOTT is associate professor of architecture, director of the Ph.D. program, and co-director of the program in Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture (CCCP) at Columbia GSAPP. In addition to articles on contemporary art and architecture, she is the author of Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics After Modernism (MIT, 2007), Living Archive 7: Ant Farm (ACTAR Editorial, 2008), and just completed a book manuscript titled Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/Architectures of Counter-Insurgency, 1966-1979, to be published by Zone Books. She was also a founding co-editor of Grey Room, a quarterly journal about architecture, art, media, and politics published by MIT Press since 2000.

PELIN TAN is a sociologist and art historian. She concluded her Ph.D. on socially engaged art in urban space and her post-doc on the methodology of artistic research at the

Art, Culture, and Technology Program of the School of Architecture and Planning, MIT. With artist Anton Vidokle, she co-directed three episodes of a sci-fi film about the future of art. Tan was an associate curator of Adhocracy, the first Istanbul Design Biennial (2012) and co-curator of Adhocracy Athens (2015). Tan is an associate professor and vice-dean of the faculty of architecture of Mardin Artuklu University. She has two forthcoming books, ARAZI (from the Critical Spatial Practices series, Sternberg Press, 2015) and Unconditional Hospitality and Threshold Architecture (dpr-barcelona, 2015).

BERNARD TSCHUMI is professor of architecture at Columbia GSAPP, and is widely known as both an architect and a theorist. His practice has designed a number of seminal projects, including the Parc de la Villette in Paris and the Acropolis Museum in Athens, and his work was recently featured in a solo show at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. His publications include Architecture Concepts: Red Is Not a Color (2012), the four-volume Event-Cities series, Architecture and Disjunction (1994), and The Manhattan Transcripts (1981). He was dean of GSAPP from 1988 to 2003.

EYAL WEIZMAN is an architect, professor of spatial and visual cultures, and director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is the principal investigator of the Forensic Architecture project, and a founding member of the architectural collective DAAR in Beit Sahour/Palestine. His books include FORENSIS: The Architecture of Public Truth (co-edited with Forensic Architecture, 2014), Mengele's Skull (with Thomas Keenan, 2012), The Least of All Possible Evils (2009), Hollow Land (2007), and A Civilian Occupation (2003). He has worked with a variety of NGOs worldwide and was a member of the B'Tselem board of directors.

MARK WIGLEY served as the dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation from 2004 to 2014, where he continues to teach as professor of architecture. An accomplished scholar and design teacher, Wigley has written extensively on the theory and practice of architecture. He is the author of Bucky Inc.: Architecture in the Age of Radio (2015), Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire (1998), White Walls, Designer Dresses:

The Fashioning of Modern Architecture (1995), and The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt (1993). He co-edited The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situalist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond (2001). Wigley has served as curator for widely attended exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Drawing Center, New York; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal; and Witte de With Museum, Rotterdam.

As the Nancy and George E. Rupp Professor, MABEL O. WILSON teaches architectural design and history/theory courses at Columbia University's GSAPP and is appointed as a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Research in African American Studies. Her scholarly essays have appeared in numerous journals and books on critical geography, memory studies, art and, architecture. Her book Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums (University of California Press, 2012) was the runner up for the John Hope Franklin Prize (2013). She is a co-founder of Who Builds Your Architecture?, which examines the links between labor, architecture, and the global networks that form around building buildings.