The **New City Reader** is a newspaper on architecture, public space and the city, published as part of "The Last Newspaper," an exhibition running at the New Museum of Contemporary Art from October 6, 2010–January 9, 2011. Conceived by executive editors Joseph Grima and Kazys Varnelis, the newspaper's content centers on the spatial implications of epochal shifts in technology, economy and society today. The **New City Reader** will consist of one edition published over the course of the project, with a new section produced weekly from within the museum's gallery space, each led by a different guest editorial team of architects, theorists and research groups. These sections will be available free at the New Museum and—in emulation of a practice common in the nineteenth-century American city and still popular in China and other parts of the world today—will be posted in public on walls throughout the city for collective reading.

Next week's issue will be CULTURE, guest edited by The School of Visual Arts Design Criticism M.F.A. program (D-Crit).

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Editorial

The New City Reader

A Newspaper Of Public Space

The New City Reader

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CLASSIFIEDS
Leagues and Legions

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by Kazys Varnelis

Writing in the Streets

As cities grew during the nineteenth century, so did writing in the streets. New forms of communication sprang up throughout the city alongside increased mass literacy. First appearing in New York around 1850, street signs and building numbers helped people make sense of a confusingly homogeneous urban grid. Advertisements announced sales and events, stores proclaimed their names and the goods they sold, while newspaper offices posted sections of papers outside of news offices to encourage people hurrying by to purchase the latest edition.

In his book "City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York," historian David M. Henkin observes how such forms of writing were public by nature. To put up a sign is a gesture to an anonymous multitude of passersby. Signs and public postings address anyone who can read, without discrimination, and in this they created a means of social cohesion. If these public texts anticipated the mass media and consumer society of the twentieth century, they also anticipated the extension of the right to vote and participate in civil society to all adults.

For a newly literate public, such texts provided a key transition from reading the city in terms of its buildings to reading the city through text. However bluntly, architecture had previously been the prime means of articulating power relations, allegiances and aspirations. The new writing of the streets spurred on a shift toward more articulate but also more ephemeral forms of communication, realizing Victor Hugo's statement, "This will kill that...the book will kill the building...." The resulting metropolis is constructed as much out of texts as out of buildings. Newspapers, signage, books, paper money, notices, handbills, stock certificates, receipts, account books and legal proceedings formed the city we know, often quite literally; the dense towers of Manhattan's downtown were built to process this proliferation of paper.

Henkin notes that the newspaper mimics the neutral grid of Manhattan and other cities that formed in the nineteenth century. Just as the city grid gave rise to a delirious New York of competing skyscrapers, the public display of newspapers prompted the scandalous, typographically-outsized headlines of the tabloids. In turn, signage mimics the structure of the newspaper. Whether on a given page or on a particular street, discrete units of text are juxtaposed to each other, competing for the reading public's eye. On newsstands and on the walls on which papers were posted, these roles overlapped.

Today, the new technologies that are transforming the media are also transforming the way we read, particularly the way we read in public. Walk down any busy city street and you will see people standing like islands in a moving stream, gazing at portable media devices. Instead of reading texts side by side with others, they are reading text messages, checking their email, looking up directions on a map or checking in at their favorite social media site. If we can keep in touch with a vast number of far-flung online friends, we are losing our ability to read—and communicate—with people in close proximity to us.

Marketers are now working on finding means to identify where we are so that the city itself can directly target us, "Minority Report"-style, with directed advertisements and messages. This city of "augmented reality" purports to be one in which we will be more connected, but fosters a culture of individual reading and interaction with a controlled media space that we define (our Twitter and Facebook friends, narrowly dialed locative media interests). As we pass through it, the city it will magically reassemble itself in information space so as to address us, removing any hint of anything that might offend. Given sufficiently advanced technologies, maybe future buildings will know if we prefer Modernism or Tudor style, amorphous blobs or Renaissance palazzi, reconfiguring themselves as we pass.

Anonymous texts addressed a public citizenry as a collective. In his book "The Big Sort," journalist Bill Bishop observes that American society is losing its ability to endure diversity. We choose the place in which we want to live based on affinities with who else lives there. Since few of us like to live among people with different political views from our own, we segregate ourselves, producing homogeneous, self-validating and often extremist enclaves. Who wants to live next door to a Tea Party advocate? In Manhattan, just about nobody, while in a former "boom town" that has run aground during the housing crash, probably a lot of people. Media target our particular demographic profiles so well that we find it impossible to communicate on matters of substance with people who live only a few miles away.

Even as the New City Reader takes advantage of contemporary technology, it also challenges our network culture. In returning to the old practice of posting newspapers in public, we put our argument out into the city to be read in hope of encouraging a little bit of debate and discussion in the streets again.

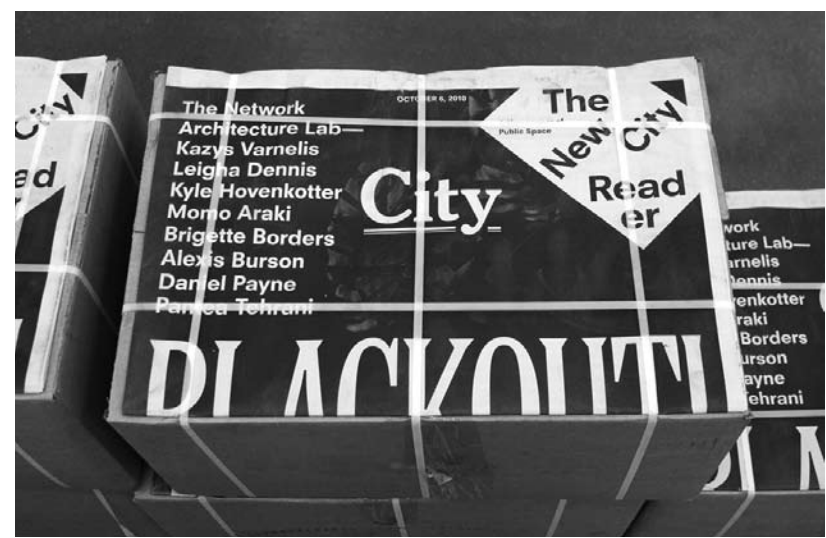India, photo by Carol L. Mitchell

Budapest, photo by Joost Van Beek

साार्बजनिक दैनिक नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Kathmandu, photo by Will Master

Jerusalem, photo by Claudius Prößer

Bologna, photo by Alexander Whillas

by Joseph Grima & Kazys Varnelis

Taking place in the context of the exhibition "The Last Newspaper," the <u>New City Reader</u> executes—for the duration of the exhibition and in full view of the public—the entire process of conception, writing and design of a weekly newspaper.

This newspaper's content derives from a series of discussions, debates, interviews and research into the spatial implications of epochal shifts in the information industry. What is replacing the newspaper's voice in the debate around the definition of urban policy? Is architectural criticism (as practiced by canonical newspaper critics such as Martin Pawley, Ada Louise Huxtable and Wolf Von Eckardt) dead, and if so, what critical influences shape the built landscape today? How are today's content-gathering systems—diffuse yet microsubject-specific—and the arrival of ultra-portable, permanently networked information platforms (such as the iPad), which make information accessible everywhere, changing our habits in relation to public space?

The idea for the <u>New City Reader</u> came when we happened upon the Chinese custom of hanging entire newspapers on boards in the streets or pasting them on walls in public places so they can be read collectively. Inspired by this custom, our newspaper is expressly designed to be affixed in a multitude of locations around the city. A run of approximately 1,000 newspapers, each addressing a specific question or topic related to the spatial implications of the disappearance of the newspaper, will be printed each week; the majority will be handed out for free in the New Museum; 20–30 will be affixed in specific locations chosen either for their prominence and visibility to a large audience, or for their proximity to sites mentioned in that specific issue. The current issue will also be visible to the public on a section of the ground-floor façade of the New Museum.

A crucial aspect of this project is the scalable design of the newspapers. They are legible in two distinct formats: as normal broadsheet-sized papers, and as billboard-size posters, designed to grab the attention of the passing public (large type, multi-page graphics). The content of the newspapers is not just textual but also graphical: illustrations, photographs and supergraphics are used as well.

This project is seen as an opportunity to take "The Last Newspaper" beyond the walls of the museum and out into public space, engaging a broad audience and raising public awareness of the debates taking place in the New Museum.

The New

by Joseph Grima

If there is a place where the words "The Last Newspaper" might sound like good news, that place is China. The International Nobel Committee's announcement that it would honor Chinese human rights activist Liu Xiaobo—currently serving an 11-year jail sentence in Jinzhou Prison for his role in drafting Charter 08, a manifesto demanding political reform signed by over 350 Chinese intellectuals and human rights activists—with this year's Nobel Peace Prize caught few by surprise. Least of all the Chinese government itself, which had preemptively warned the Norwegian government that it would consider such a move "inflammatory," and that the consequences would be counterproductive to the Committee's intentions. Yet the Chinese media universally failed to acknowledge the Nobel announcement, critically or otherwise, offering yet another demonstration of the Government's capillary control over the news. The gaping void left by the absence of real journalism in China might suggest the lack of any force capable of counteracting the ruling Communist Party; while this is largely the case, it is also true that Chinese society has produced a diverse and fascinating array of instruments of subversion, propaganda and resistance—most of which considerably predate the arrival of the Internet.

It can be tempting to assume that no space of collective protest existed prior to the Web's relatively widespread diffusion in China over the past ten years. Given the Internet's role today as the prime organizational locus of political resistance in China, it is true that Beijing is notoriously and understandably paranoid when it comes to online dissent; it is no coincidence that Liu Xiaobo was detained by police hours before the online release of Charter 08. And while the persecution of bloggers by the Chinese government—perhaps most prominently, architect/artist Ai Weiwei, whose installation in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall opened to the public last week—has attracted widespread international indignation, what is less well-known is that activism of the kind exercised by agitators such as Ai has precise historical antecedents in Chinese culture. Furthermore, these antecedents allow unusually precise analogs to be drawn between the collective perception of the Internet and public space in the city, at least in terms of their potential as forums for the expression of both citizenship and political defiance.

One of these is the dàzìbào (literally "big-character poster"): a handwritten, usually anonymous poster bearing large-sized Chinese characters, prominently pasted in public space since imperial times as a means of protest, propaganda, dissent and denunciation. As literacy rates rose after the 1911 revolution, the dàzìbào grew in popularity to become the grass-roots weapon of choice for exposing and chastening corrupt local officials; in a society so strongly marked by a sense of collective identity, shame was a powerful weapon.

A key trigger in the Cultural Revolution was the publication of a dàzìbào on May 25, 1966, by Nie Yuanzi and others at Beijing University that claimed the university was controlled by "bourgeois anti-revolutionaries." The poster came to the attention

The dàzìbào by Nie Yuanzi at Beijing in May 1966 that helped spark the cultural revolution

photo by Gaia Cambiaggi

of Mao Zedong, who had its contents broadcast nationally and published in the People's Daily. Big-character posters were soon ubiquitous and became organs for everything from sophisticated debate to satirical entertainment to rabid denunciation.

The dàzìbào's role as a forceful mechanism of influence on popular opinion was underscored throughout the years of the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong subsequently incited China's teenagers to revolt against his enemies in the Communist Party through a mass-posting of dàzìbào denouncing the "capitalist-roaders." Mao's infatuation with the dàzìbào as an instrument of mass persuasion was such that he even had the constitution amended in 1966 to legitimize their posting—possibly the last time what amounted to uncensored publishing was formally authorized until the arrival of the Internet made total control impracticable.

Little more than a decade later, in the winter of 1978, a 200-yard brick wall to the west of Tien'anmen Square became the location for a new wave of dàzìbào criticizing many aspects of Chinese life, including Mao and his political legacy. In "Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements," John Downing writes,

It quickly became known as the Democracy Wall and attracted many readers as well as open-air public discussions and speeches. Some of the dàzìbào were very long, consisting of numerous sheets, equivalent to a very lengthy journal article or even a small book...One very popular dàzìbào, however, was extremely short, a poem consisting of a single character for the word Net, which condensed into this one image the sense of being hemmed in at all points and the frustration deeply felt by young Chinese in particular.

Sensing the danger of surrendering total dominance of public space during the Cultural Revolution to homespun dàzìbào, state-sanctioned newspapers made increasingly frequent appearances on walls, in squares and on bulletin boards in dàzìbào-like configurations. It is a custom that still endures and that implies a very different conception of the newspaper from the model the West has come to take for granted. Not least, it implies a radically different financial model: a newspaper primarily intended not to be bought but to be affixed publicly and read collectively can be understood as a public service—or a form of propaganda, depending on one's point of view.

In this context, the debate around the disappearance of the newspaper takes on very different implications. If,

from our perspective, what is at stake in the debate on the newspaper's future is the survival of a vital organ of democracy and therefore the future of political freedom itself, the contrary could be said to be true in China. In recent history, newspapers—whether hung in public or read individually—are tightly controlled organs engaged in the propagation of an official narrative, which few even within China would mistake for faithful journalism or impartial criticism. The media are the domain of the Party; spaces of collectivity and participation are the primary, or perhaps only, spaces of dissent.

These spaces need not necessarily be physical. The persecution of activists such as Liu Xiaobao and Ai Wei Wei—and Google's temporary withdrawal from China over censorship-related disputes—has led to the perception in the West that every aspect of online life in China is uncompromisingly policed. The reality, however, is that the government is unable or perhaps uninterested in trying to control everything. The online version of the dàzìbào—the r enrou sousuo yinqing (literally "human flesh search engine")—is among these states of exemption from control. In his New York Times article of March 3, 2010, Tom Downey describes the phenomenon:

They are a form of online vigilante justice in which Internet users hunt down and punish people who have attracted their wrath. The goal is to get the targets of a search fired from their jobs, shamed in front of their neighbors, run out of town...The popular meaning is now not just a search by humans but also a search for humans, initially performed online but intended to cause real-world consequences...Human-flesh searches highlight what people are willing to fight for: the political issues, polarizing events and contested moral standards that are the fault lines of contemporary China.

The searches occur not on a specific site but across many bulletin boards, and are powered by wang min—self-declared Internet citizens, or Netizens. "The word 'Netizen' exists in English," Downey points out. "But you hear its equivalent used much more frequently in China, perhaps because the public space of the Internet is one of the few places where people can in fact act like citizens."

It has been suggested that informal mechanisms of denunciation such as the human flesh search engine are not only tolerated but encouraged by the government. In a country like China, geographically vast yet with an intensely centralized power structure, control over peripheral regions can be difficult to exert, and exasperation over the corruption of low-level officials can be a source of political instability. It is one of the paradoxes of contemporary China that by tolerating a degree of unfettered criticism online, the Party relies to no small extent on its own citizens to police its members with the aim of perpetuating its power.

The twentieth-century history of the dàzìbào—a form of individual political participation that finds its expression in the streets and squares of the city—is also a history of struggle over the public sphere and for free speech in China. In the West, meanwhile, an obsessive pursuit of safety and control that is parcel of the post-9/11 condition has led to the almost complete obliteration of liberty and individual agency in public space. While the absence of true journalism in China is lamentable, we should remember that if the newspaper is well on its way out anyway, at least the Chinese will be left with a long-ingrained sense of visceral attachment to public space in the city. We might not be so lucky.

大字报 (Dàzìbào)
The Spatial Practice of Democracy

by Joseph Grima & Markus Miessen

Brew me some coffee, brew me some cardamom
These black beans will heal my soul.
How can we burn this and pour it in our hearts,
So that it may release our dreams and our goals.

--Poem recited by Colonel Khalaf Al-Tebi of the
Saudi Army at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
conference prior to calling for the invasion and
liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqis.

Political parties are banned in Kuwait. Yet throughout recent history, Kuwait's political process has found an indirect form of democratic expression in a deeply rooted cultural tradition that corresponds to an architectural typology: the diwaniyyah. The diwaniyyah is a simple, four-sided room with seating on each side; the daily meetings held within ritually feature the consumption of tea and coffee. By providing a platform for facilitating quick communication and consensus-building, Kuwait's diwaniyyahs constitute an instrument of political expression and debate that in many ways mirrors the role of the newspaper in the West. It is no coincidence that the diwaniyyah was of central importance in the struggle against the Iraqi occupation in 1990, a fact acknowledged with poetic subtlety in Colonel Khalaf Al-Tebi's address to the GCC prior to the first Gulf war.

Concurrently, when considered in the general political framework of the Kuwaiti society, the diwaniyyah acts as a form of distributed assembly where consensus is achieved in small, interconnected groups. Societal grievances are broadcast and filtered as they climb the hierarchy of these congregations. It is significant that, in the parliamentary elections of 2009, the four female candidates to win seats and became Kuwait's first female lawmakers had been visiting the typically male spaces of the diwaniyyah prior to the election, a fact that was not always received positively.

Our interest in the diwaniyyah rests in its concrete role as an architectural/spatial typology that is also a protagonist in the contemporary history of Kuwaiti political life. The diwaniyyah is both a real space and a metaphor. It is the elementary particle of Kuwaiti politics—an unusually crystalline manifestation, in a commonplace and humble architectural form, of architecture's potential as a facilitator of political expression.

The exhibition Diwaniyyah: Architectural Space of
Political Exchange, a research project by Joseph
Grima and Markus Miessen, will be on display at the
Graduate School of Design, Harvard University from
December 2, 2010 to January 10, 2011.

Images from "Diwaniyyah: Architectural Space of
Political Exchange." Filmography by Elian Stefa.

Diwaniyyah— The Space of Consensus

A Conversation with Vito Acconci

Vito Acconci is an artist, writer, designer and architect. From his topographical poetry of the 1960s, innovative performances of the 70s and subsequent interactive installations, his transdisciplinary practice has always stayed one step ahead of the trend. In 1988, he formed Acconci Studio, a design firm that mixes poetry and geometry, narrative and biology, chemistry and social science. The studio's approach to architecture and spatial design favors circulation over nodes, fluidity over fixity. Current projects include an interactive tunnel through a building in Indianapolis, a meditation park near an archaeological site near Eindhoven, Netherlands, a portable retractable roof in Lucerne, Switzerland and a plaza divided into cluster places for self-organization in Santiago, Chile.

The conversation took place on October 7, 2010 at the New Museum, New York.

Joseph Grima
In 1990 you wrote an essay entitled "Public Space in a Private Time" that could be read as a series of definitions of public space in the contemporary. What is public space?

Vito Acconci   In the time of 1990 or in the time right now?

JG   Both. How has public space changed from 1990 to today?

VA   In the time when I wrote the essay, I thought it was necessary to separate the notion of public space from the notion of a plaza—that the plaza was an outdated kind of public space; that a plaza, because it was a large almost kind of undefined space, I thought could never be used for any kind of public action, any kind of social action, because it demanded a leader. That the only way people could be brought together is if one person brought them together, so that people could never develop their own notion of public space; they were always subjected to the notion of the leader.

And I thought at that time that maybe the way to deal with public space was to break it up into smaller parts. It had to be broken up into clusters, clusters that possibly would hold maybe three people in one, five people in another, nine people elsewhere. So people could discuss, with each other, without the need of a leader.

But the assumption I had was that from one cluster, somebody would then leave that cluster and meander over to another, so gradually all of these people would possibly talk together. And that kind of space probably already exists, but probably not so much in public spaces. It probably exists in bars, though I admit I'm not exactly a bar-goer, but from afar, this is the kind of thing that could potentially happen. So it usually happens in places that you pay to go, which troubled me, because I didn't quite know—

JG   —there's a paradox, right?

VA   Yeah, it seemed like that was the only time that you could have a kind of self-organizing public, and a public that was small enough, not just to think for themselves, but to be constantly in discussion. Now, 20 years later, I'm a little more puzzled. But even then I thought, OK, maybe one place public space can happen is in these smaller places. The other place was, it could happen on the phone, but also it could happen maybe not in a plaza but in the intersections of the city. It could happen where people were crossing the street.

The great thing about a city is intersections. That you're inevitably in the position of always being about to meet some

one. Now, have I ever actually met someone crossing the street in New York? Probably not. But at the same time, there's the possibility of that. Now again, is that possibility followed only when one of those people crossing another grabs that other by the shoulders and doesn't let that person go? That's not the kind of public interaction I was hoping for. But I guess in some ways I think everything I said was probably based on a kind of nostalgia for the late 60s in the United States, on a nostalgia for Columbia in 1968, for Berkeley in 1968, the kind of college campus that was built as part of a city.

I remember we were doing a project in Las Vegas in the early 90s. It was at the city hall in Las Vegas, and it was very significant that that building was built in 1973. The building was approximately 60 feet tall, it was a kind of convex curve at the bottom, there were no doors, at the very top of the building there was a line of windows, and in front of the convex curve, there was what they called a reflecting pool—you could also call it a moat. But that's kind of what happened, because of Columbia and Berkeley, with buildings that were built in 1969, '70, '71. I was in a school—I think in Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio—I was taken down to the basement and in the basement, they had these gates that could be brought down in case students were amassing down in the basement; they would, in effect, put them in a cell.

JG   Incredible. So that's an interesting opposition you've created there between the intersection and the cell, the dungeon.

VA   Yeah, but it was very clear; at college campuses built, say '73, '74, no longer was there this kind of crossing the street, crossing the walkway. The walkway went usually from the dormitory to the dining hall to the classrooms. So nothing crossed.

Alan Rapp   The commons disappeared.

VA   Yeah, the commons. But especially that intersection, I think, is the keynote of the city, and maybe stopping for traffic helps, because now you have nothing to do for a minute or so, so maybe you start a conversation with somebody, and maybe you say to somebody, "I hate such and such, what do you hate?"

JG   There's a great book by the photographer Florian Böhm called "Wait for Walk," which is photographs of people waiting to walk across the street, waiting for the red man to turn green, and it's incredible because they're these really timeless photos where people are captivated in this moment of suspense, where for a moment, for them the city stops. They have to stop within the city, and you read this kind of puzzlement on their face, this kind of dreaming, and this moment of exception within their daily rhythm that is quite shocking, actually.

VA   But there are probably always people in that condition who want to outwit the city, who want to say, "I can make it across the street before this car gets here."

JG   There's also the possibility of transgression, the temptation to transgress. But do you think, speaking of the intersection as an architectural typology or as an urbanistic typology, is that something that—obviously you've described the dungeon typology that can be designed—is it equally possible to design the intersection? Is that something that can be introduced, not literally the intersection, but that possibility of encounter? Can that be designed?

VA   You know, when I think of the stuff we do, when I think of the stuff Acconci Studio does, I don't think we're so interested in making nodes and making stopping places. We're much more interested in circulation routes. My stuff became architecture for a kind of simple reason, because I realized I had really no interest in viewers, but I did have interest in participants, users, inhabitants. I wanted to make places where maybe people could

do something that they maybe didn't have the chance to do elsewhere. So when we think of spaces, we think, what are people doing? How do people come in contact with each other? How do they cross each other? Another reason that brought me to architecture is that I realized, with architecture—or maybe stretch that a little bit but we're probably already stretched with the word architecture—with architecture and design, you can possibly deal with all the every day occasions of every day life.

The other thing that was important to me was that there were people in these museums and galleries, and I wanted people to be part of whatever it was that I did, and that's when I started to realize that I was doing installations—I did an installation in 1976 at Sonnabend Gallery with this table where people would gather at the table, the table was propped up on the windowsill of the gallery, then went out the window. I probably realized at that time that yes, when you do a piece, you hope you're saying something to other people, but you're also trying to say something to yourself. And I think with that piece I was saying to myself, about galleries, "I have to get out of this. I have to find a way to get out of here." It took me a while. My stuff was always amazingly literal-minded.

JG   I remember that piece. It looks kind of like a diving board —into the void that is architecture, I guess...

VA   And it probably was a void, to me. I can't work as a single person, single artist; I started to think I have to work as part of a group of people, and I needed that for two basic reasons. One very basic one: I wanted to do architecture, but I really didn't know how. So I had to work with people that did know how; so I had to work with people who had gone to architecture school. But there was just as important a reason, maybe more important: my stuff has always been so oriented by language, influenced by language, I got obsessed with English language phrases like, "the person who lives by the sword, dies by the sword," which I translated into, "if something begins private, it ends private." So

I started to think, you can't do public stuff by yourself. Public has to start from at least a miniature version of public, and that miniature version is probably three. One is a solo, two is a couple, or a mirror image—a third person starts an argument. And public begins when an argument starts. So from 1988 on, there were no Vito Acconci pieces—except writing, essays, or...I don't know how to write in public.

Neil Donnelly   We're doing it.

VA   ...at that time I said some things about how a museum would never be a really public space. I'm probably not as right as I thought I was then. At least parts of museums now—there are parts of museums where you don't have to pay. So as long as you don't have to pay it's at least a potentially public space. But what the museum finds a very hard time getting rid of are the "Do Not Touch" signs. As long as there are "Do Not Touch" signs, the museum is always going to say that art is more expensive than people. I don't know if it could ever get rid of that, and of course there are reasons.

JG   I wanted to come back, actually, to a sentence that really struck me in your essay, "Public Life in a Private Time," you said that the collision of electronics and bodies will subvert the organizational information end of cities. And of course this was written in 1990, well before any of us were even remotely aware of what the Internet was.

VA   At that time I had never even touched a computer.

JG   But this statement is of course laden with all sorts of prophetic implications, this idea of a profound change in the organization of the city.

VA   And I still kind of want to believe that maybe that can happen in the Internet, because it really is uncontrollable. So, it seems impossible that in a world where electronics exist, where computers exist, that anything authoritarian can exist. But it still does, and I'm not exactly sure why.

JG   In The New Yorker last week, Malcolm Gladwell wrote a long piece on why the social network can actually never be an effective forum for political agitation. Do you agree with that?

VA   Well, you know, I wanted to believe it could; have I ever really used it in a way to start something? Or...I probably haven't. But I'm curious, why did he think that?

to kill somebody, and now that you and somebody else are starting a revolution, they'll possibly kill you, and that revolution will never happen.

JG   I know that you have in the past claimed to have been strongly influenced by the Situationists and their thinking on public space.

VA   Actually, I wasn't—until much later. When I started doing work at the end of the 60s, early 70s, I had no idea the Situationists existed. The "Situationist International Anthology" came out of San Francisco, I think, in 1979. It was the first I knew of them. And I thought, God, what an amazing waste of time, I could have not done some of these things because they already did them! But I didn't know it until later.

Little magazines were very important at that time. Little magazines—this had nothing to do with public space, it had to do with the opposite, actually. It had to do with the emphasis on single-person and privacy; I think a lot of us started to know each other's work through magazines like Avalanche, Interfunktionen in Cologne, Artitudes in France, and it was a kind of important thing because before that, sure, I knew people who were doing somewhat similar work, you know; I knew Dan Graham, I knew Dennis Oppenheim, and I knew of some other Americans—maybe not personally—Bruce Nauman, etc. But when you saw that wow, there's a person in Holland doing this, there's a person in Milan doing this, you start to think maybe you're not crazy. Maybe there's something in the air. Maybe there's something that people are grabbing at and starting to share. So it gave you some reason to go on.

Though where I got that stuff certainly wasn't from other art, I got that stuff from sociology. I got that stuff from reading Erving Goffman. Which, you know, titles of Erving Goffman books would have been titles I wished I had written about mine—"The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," "Relations in Public." But again, where did that stuff come from? And I know we're supposed to be talking about public space, but we're talking about very private space.

But what I and other people in the architecture context were doing was what people in music were doing. It was what Neil Young was doing, Van Morrison was doing—mostly men, but there was an occasional woman admitted—Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon. Mostly it was a long song, a nine-minute song, where a single male voice can do what the common language of the time was: find oneself. I mean, that was the time my stuff went from poetry to art. I didn't think there was anything you could do, except stuff involving yourself, because that's what the time was saying: the notion of finding oneself—everyone was trying to find themselves. The sixties was a weird time. On the one had, it was a time when it seemed that a revolution could possibly occur in the United States, but at the same time, it was people saying, we have to get away from ordinary life in order to isolate ourselves, in order to find the self. I think after a while most of us realized: if you isolate yourself to find the self, there isn't any self. A self only exists as part of a social system, a political system, a cultural system; but it took some time for some people, including me, to realize that.

Daniel Payne   He argues it doesn't create a strong form of connection between people. They only use it as sort of a surface gloss—never really connected in the way that we need to be. He goes back to the 60s and says that it really takes a lot more courage to have this physical danger...physical danger that you never get by being on Facebook or Twitter or whatever. It really takes it down to the people who sat next to each other as they were friends and sat up late nights planning social movements...

AR   The physical spaces still exist, but is your analysis that a plaza is a sort of outdated typology because there is no space for revolutionary movements to engage?

VA   I mean, I think there are places in the city—physical places—where there might be, but I think they're more in side streets, back alleys, back rooms, that they might have to be places where you go off from the place that's announced as public, and you find the kind of underside space. Where somebody else might be there, trying

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Storefront for Art and Architecture stocks a selection of 10 or so books by important figures in its history. These are Vito Acconci's, in his own words.

THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION   JG Ballard
[In the RE/Search Publications edition (1990)] Ballard made more notes on every part of the project. So for me, it wasn't just the Ballard novel, the great thing is that you can read two different things at once. You can read the subject matter and its commentary at the same time. But even by itself, it's great.

EXERCISES IN STYLE   Raymond Queneau
The attempt is maybe better than the thing. The attempt was to write [the story of a simple incident] in 120 or so different ways. In some ways, similar to the notion of, "Can you read two things at once?" You can always say things with a kind of variant. There is no privileged version.

THE WRITING OF THE DISASTER   Maurice Blanchot
It has a first sentence that I can't get out of my mind, but I don't know if it's a very precise and profound sentence or if it's a sentence of a doddering old man. "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact." At one point, maybe before I read this, I loved things like that. Those sentences that had an amazing factuality.

THE BOOK OF SURVIVAL: THE ORIGINAL GUIDE TO STAYING ALIVE IN THE CITY, THE SUBURBS, AND THE WILD LANDS BEYOND   Anthony Greenbank
This could have been like an early piece of mine. It's an incredible book. And it's totally serious. At the same time, he knows the problem with being totally serious. The great thing about comedy is it reveals that there is a second thought. When you have a second thought, you're reconsidering. You believe something, but now that you're laughing, you don't believe it anymore. As soon as you don't believe something, I think comedy starts. But also self-thinking starts. I don't think you can think for yourself in overseriousness.

STORY OF THE EYE   George Bataille
The Georges Bataille book is amazing. It's used beautifully in the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard's Weekend. In the first chapter, it's a pornographic novel....It's kind of astonishing.

A TOPOLOGICAL PICTUREBOOK   George K. Francis
In the late nineties, we and every other architect in the world that we paid attention to were obsessed with the notion of this kind of endless space. I think at the studio now we are much more interested in maybe exploding a space. Maybe a surface should be made of particles. Pixels. Grains. I wish things could be grains in the air. We don't know how to do that yet.

LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS   Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown & Steven Izenour
The first book that made me start to be obsessed with architecture, particularly because it was architecture of everyday life. You know, much as I hated postmodern architecture, if it wasn't for postmodern architecture, I would never be able to do it. But when an architect says—let's think of the windows as eyes and window in the middle as a nose and a door as a mouth—that's when I thought, "Hey, I can think like a child." So architecture became accessible to me.

DELIRIOUS NEW YORK   Rem Koolhaas
If there's any architect I want to pay constant attention to, it is Rem Koolhaas. Do I love the architecture so much? Somewhat. I love maybe more that he might be the Marshall McLuhan of the twenty-first century. But I don't think he could do the writing that he did if it wasn't for the architecture.

A-POC MAKING   Issey Miyake and Dai Fujiwara
Clothing for us is the first architecture. I don't know how to read a dress pattern, but I love the fact that a dress pattern is on paper in the same way you can read words on paper or you can read a diagram on paper.

INVENTIONS: THE PATENTED WORKS OF R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER
To me, it's my favorite Buckminster Fuller book, because unlike a lot of the stuff he was doing in the sixties where he sort of became a priest for the counter-cultural movement, this is very much a book of his inventions, his attempts to get patents on stuff. I hope when I err, I err on the side of fact rather than solemnity and abstraction. I mean when I was writing, I hated abstractions. I hated adjectives. I wished writing could be all verbs. I wished it could be all motion. I wished it could be all concrete.

TENSILE STRUCTURES   Frei Otto
Frei Otto interests us because he convinces us that no matter how obsessed with computers we are, we have to do little study models. We have to do study models of physical reactions. Frei Otto makes everything—he makes everything provable.

A NEW KIND OF SCIENCE   Stephen Wolfram
I don't think I can understand a word in this book, but I know it's the most important book that's come out in the last few years. The interesting thing about it is that it's using something that isn't exactly diagrams, but it's doing math the way you might do some kind of relations of words—but they're not words. If you look at the book a few times there's something you can sense. You can tell something is about density, something is about emptiness, something is about pitter-patter, zigzag. There are ways you kind of sense what is going on.

On Books—
Vito Acconci

Got a match?

by Daniel Payne

city

Glazing the Network

Early in the film "Playtime," Jacques Tati's 1967 visual poem on life amid the architecture of the modern city, a man on the street approaches a lingering building attendant to ask for a light for his cigarette. The attendant holds his matchbook up to agree—but instead of striking a match, he motions off screen. The two men proceed left until the frame reveals a building column and door, which the attendant opens to complete the favor. Though we could never see it on screen, a large plate glass window had divided the two men the entire time.

Among the many effects Tati draws out in this scene are some of the "weak-tie" social connections that Malcolm Gladwell cites as the benefits of social networks in his New Yorker article "Small Change: Why The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted" (October 4, 2010). Though disconnected in space, the visual transparency of glass allowed the man on the street to gain access to information (the attendant's matchbook) that allowed him to find a light for his cigarette—a small act of kindness that required little personal investment on the part of the attendant. But Gladwell is less sanguine about the possibility of more effective change resulting from these social networks. For this, we need "strong-tie" connections—something he and others believe just can't be found as a result of this new form of interaction.

To further investigate this claim about the translation of electronic relationships to physical space, let's tune in to the cultural effects of the physical material Tati used to create his initial disconnect: glass. For modern architects, glass created visual transparency but also acted physically as divider and screen. Their buildings used glazing to reflect and refract light, breaking the inside from out, dividing interior spaces and manipulating the spatial life of the cities in which they stood. By mid-century, the curtain wall freed architects to thin the building envelope, inviting the exterior inside. This embedded an illusion of openness that was important to corporations hoping to maximize growth after World War II. The orderly, rational world of work was engraved on the exterior of buildings as an advertisement for the masses, yet despite the invitation, not everything was actually revealed to the outsider. The glass screen of the curtain wall was cast in Roland Barthes' myth of transparency, concealing the inner workings of profit production and revealing little else.

Social networks like Twitter, Facebook and their many cousins leave the glass behind but employ silica, chips and fiber optics that now define the technologies that control contemporary life, promising us transparency through a global network of interaction. Social networks are the new windows to a perceived world, but so far they have only recreated the cultural effects of ostensible transparency for a networked society. Instead of creating a truly new means of interaction, the dematerialization of this looking glass provides a cipher upon which the concentrated forces of the past can imprint their effects. These sites—loci of attention (or rather, distraction) for millions of subscribers—merge divider and screen for a new generation.

Gladwell is right in saying that social networks allow us to curate our own image. We call out the groups we proudly belong to while we stare blankly at our monitor, loosening possible ties by the lack of direct human participation. And the access to everyone you've ever met sounds great—until you try to keep track of everyone you've ever met. Our feeds fill page after page, a stock ticker of life rushing quickly past even the most alert eyes. We learned how to shorten words to maximize our 140 characters and soon can't communicate a longer thought. The social network has expanded, but our spheres of influence have collapsed.

But perhaps Gladwell misses the promise in these sites. Could Facebook and other social networks prove to be a latent force of engagement, double agents hiding behind a veneer of apolitical inaction? Perhaps these sites can't drive a revolution, but instead may act as a more powerful tool for social interaction: a new forum for creating the strong bonds necessary for courageous action, promoting empathy and understanding among previously disconnected actors. While Gladwell accurately writes, "activism that challenges the status quo—that attacks deeply rooted problems—is not for the faint of heart," could these sites actually embolden us?

The New York Times Magazine has profiled one possible scenario, reporting on a group of young Egyptian protestors that used Facebook as a means to organize their offline activities ("Revolution, Facebook Style," January 22, 2009). Ethan Zuckerman, a research fellow at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, called it the "cute-cat theory of digital activism...The government can't simply shut down Facebook, because doing so would alert a large group of people who they can't afford to radicalize." This process was also seen during the protests following the 2009 Iranian elections, when the central government of Iran had difficulty finding and shutting down news distribution through Twitter and other social networking sites.

The sheer numbers of people engaged on these sites make them an enticing force to contemplate harnessing; there are 500 million subscribers on Facebook alone. Barack Obama's 2008 campaign may have provided a small insight into what could happen when the connective tissue of the Internet is pulled into political action. But so far, there seem to be few actions originated there that move beyond the electronic world. It is this point of translation that troubles Gladwell, but about which a younger generation that grew up immersed in both spheres may be more hopeful.

By the end of "Playtime," Tati's M. Hulot has infiltrated the pristine modern world and reorganized people's relationship to its buildings and materiality. Midway through the film's 45-minute nightclub scene, Hulot crashes through the glass door that separates the interior of upper crust life from the vagrants and hippies on the street. Despite the doorman's intent to keep the illusion intact, a new set of people plow through the entrance, transforming the club into a rollicking happening. The question becomes, how can we act as Hulot today, truly exploiting the potential of these social networks for a public use? It must be our priority to shatter this new glass and install in its place the exciting and deep connections that lead to critical intelligence for the daily political lives in our cities and communities.

Frames from the film, Playtime, 1967

Read er

by John Cantwell

There are no wasted elements in the media of agitation. From Dadaist collage to punk flyer, the materials, design, and means of distribution all reflect the ethics and beliefs specific to those groups.

Beyond the design and production factors, even the most banal elements, like the means of fixing a poster to a wall, are significant as well. What would Luther have used if he didn't have nails?

STAPLES

Punks of the 1970s and early 80s cloaked wooden telephone poles with layers of Xeroxed letter-sized flyers. Menacing in their forwardness, grainy and distorted from photocopying, these black-and-white notices gathered strength from their numbers: the more they piled up, the more pervasive the Punk element seemed.

The flyers were posted with staples, a readily available, lo-fi choice that reflected a no-frills culture. There was poetic significance in the staple, as well. Tiny, delicate objects, capable of puncturing hard surfaces but easily bent if deployed even a little askew, staples pointed to the contradictions at the core of punk's best compositions: brutal and compact, yet somehow fragile.

LOCKS

The Dutch anarchist group Provo existed for only two years until its official disbanding in 1967. In that time, the Provos gained notoriety for provoking violent reactions from the Dutch police through nonviolent acts. One week Provo would distribute pamphlets explaining how to construct a bomb out of a pineapple (the instructions were useless); another they'd issue a press release stating that Queen Julianna had declared herself an anarchist and was transferring power to Provo.

The group also had serious and influential ideas about transportation and urban planning. The White Bikes program, introduced by the Provos in 1966, was one of the world's first successful bike sharing programs. Provo took 50 old bicycles, painted them white and left them around Amsterdam, free for anyone to use. When city officials threatened to confiscate the bikes on the grounds that it was illegal to leave a bike unlocked, Provo chained the bikes with combination locks and painted the combinations on the bikes. Even obedience can be an act of subversion.

PASTE

The New City Reader staff uses wheat paste every week to post copies of the paper around New York (with permission). While searching online for a wheat paste recipe, we learned that this adhesive goes by another name: Marxist Glue. Cheap and easy to make—a working man's glue—this simple mixture of flour and water was for years an integral element of the distribution of Leftist materials and propaganda.

Wheat paste was a means of promulgating other messages as well, helping the circus poster and gig announcement find temporary purchase around the city. From the mass-postings of Robbie Conal's trenchant caricatures in the 1980s to Shepard Fairey's profitable brand of populism today, the poster finds its home with this homebrew glue. "Marxist Glue" is also a multi-artist show opening at Hold Up Art in Los Angeles on October 28, further detailing the applications of poster-making and display in contemporary art.

Your own revolutionary messaging begins with one part flour to three parts water, mixed while heating to a boil. Let the mixture cool, then apply liberally.

Politics Needs Architecture   The Bonds of Revolution

Stefano Boeri is the principal of Milan-based practice Stefano Boeri Architetti, the editor-in-chief of Abitare and cofounder of the research collective Multiplicity. He is currently running for mayor of Milan. The New City Reader asked him for a statement on the relationship between architecture and politics in the contemporary urban sphere.

Politics today is only too frequently a matter of pledging new walls, promising new borders; in this sense, architecture itself is a protagonist in politics on a daily basis. This is the first relationship that bonds architecture and politics today. There's an inherent contradiction between the reality of the contemporary political sphere—a realm that every day, week, every month needs to produce spatialized imagery of a better future—and architecture itself, which in this context is deprived of some of its fundamental prerequisites such as contextuality, relevance, timeliness. Architecture's greatest strength is in endurance; architecture challenges and conquers reality in the long run... both in the duration of the construction cycle and the lifespan of architectural artifacts.

There is, however, a second relationship that ties architecture and politics today that is more metaphorical and allows us to take architecture as an extraordinary opportunity for insight into society. There is a very precise relationship that ties space and society, which allows us to use space, local space in particular, as a metaphor for society itself. It's something politics has been unable or unwilling to do in recent years: to look to architecture and the territory as a way of understanding what is going on in society, what the macro-phenomena are. Observing the territory in recent years, a tendency towards individualism and hyper-fragmentation of society is evident—it's something that has long been visible in the landscape and the built environment, something architecture has been telling us about for years, but few in the political sphere have actually taken any notice.

My personal trajectory has involved both forms of engagement with architecture: first the former, then the latter. I think there is also a third way one can engage architecture—one could say I arrived at this third approach having experienced the limits of the other two—and this third way is a result of the realization that certain forms of spatial intervention are possible only through politics. One could say that after having used architecture to engage political issues for many years, I'm now trying to use politics to engage architectural problems. There are some issues of policy and governance that simply cannot be addressed through the images and visualizations that traditional politics employ, or the ability to interpret and narrate contemporary society. These two things are no longer enough. Politics needs something more than this, and that's where our expertise as architects can be usefully employed. But this is quite a radical choice. The figure of the mayor is a point of convergence of great visions and great pragmatism, and that's what makes this role fascinating and unique.