architheses

Internationale Zeitschrift und Schriftenreihe für Architektur
International thematic review for architecture

6.2014 Dezember

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architheses 6.2014 Dezember 44. Jahrgang CHF 28.–

Titelbild: Luca Giordano, *Raub der Europa*, Öl auf Leinwand, zwischen 1675 und 1677

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

Reflections on Territorial Agency Riots in Kiev's main square, a peninsula annexed by Russia, a EU-Ukraine trade agreement under negotiation, the US celebrating the flowering of democracy in yet another Eastern Bloc country, and a Malaysia Airlines plane shot down – these are some of the events involving an unlikely entanglement of people and things that are currently reshuffling political and economic alliances. For its part, territory is examined as an agent in driving this socio-spatial reorganization, serving as a mirror for reflecting on questions of spatial governance.

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"[T]he 'Body Politik' is not only made of people![1] [It is] thick with things". Bruno Latour, 2006

Authors: Marc Angélil and Cary Siress

There is more to the mirror than meets the eye. Turned around and held up to someone else, the mirror has the power to reverse standing relations, even if just for a moment. When used tactically in a face-off between opposing factions, the mirror becomes an effective agent of protest, as was recently the case in Kiev. At a demonstration in Independence Square, officially named Maidan Nezalezhnosti but locally known simply as the Maidan, security police found themselves confronted by their own reflections in mirrors held up by women using them as would-be shields to empower themselves and at the same time to figuratively disarm riot forces in one potent gesture.[2] Serving to reveal power relations for what they really are – namely, fragile constructions that can be shaken by something as seemingly innocuous as a mirror – the action was taken to remind the ruling regime of its violent crackdown on an earlier student rally. Because mirrors were deployed in such an unexpected way as peaceful weapons, the demonstration drew even more attention to the cause from national and international media alike. Yet with all eyes on the Ukraine, nobody at the time could anticipate the chain of events that would ripple out from this square to the rest of the world, thus entangling a small country in a geopolitical tug-of-war reminiscent of the Cold War era.

At issue then, as well as now, are political-economic agendas and their claim on populations and territories. Notwithstanding the particulars of the situation, the 'mirror protest' in Kiev mirrors events elsewhere that just as significantly disclose how governance, people, and territory aggregate in complex relations to produce the volatile and often conflicting spaces that we inhabit. Frequently overlooked in this constellation are the roles that territory itself plays as an actor in the body politic. Rather than being merely a benign container of activities or passive entity on which indiscriminate forces act, territory can be considered a 'thing' in the Latourian sense, an agent that brings together an "assembly of relevant parties" and "triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute."[3] Far from being the static background behind the action of human affairs, territory binds disparate sets of desires, beliefs, behaviors, interests, indig-

nations, and the like into matters of concern that truly do matter for all concerned.[4] This is to say that territory manifests an amalgam of competing motives, each oriented to uphold a claim in space and time.

In the case of the demonstration in Kiev, territory assumes a multivalent role as both arena and actor. The protests did not take place just anywhere, but instead in the center of the capital, on a public site granted historical importance as a symbol of political activity in the country. Overnight, a tent city was thrown together at the footsteps of the seat of government to house the hordes of assembled activists. Their repeated clashes with military troops left the square a smoldering battleground. But this is only the local site of a conflict that is more global in its impact. The larger issue in the uprising was Ukraine's westward turn toward the European Union, a disposition that put the nation at odds with Russia's own ambition to keep a valuable ally under its sway, both politically and economically. A torn land set the stage for a standoff between the free market, with its neoliberal ideology, and a centrally controlled economy harboring its own neoliberal aspirations. But which way should one go when faced with a choice between the lesser of two evils? Although the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement has been ratified – giving the West grounds to celebrate the flowering of democracy in yet another Eastern Bloc country – and talks with Russia concerning energy supplies are underway, parts of

1 **View of the Maidan in Kiev, showing the debris of a night of clashes between protesters and police, with a tent city in the background, February 19, 2014** (photo: Olga Yakimovich, © Reuters)

the Ukraine are still basically a war zone. As in so many other such conflicts, territorial claims – civic, national, regional, and global – and the moves made on their behalf shape the world as we know it.

For that matter, the mirrors wielded by the protesters are likewise 'things,' for they initiated a crucial pause for reflection in an otherwise explosive setting. Here, the mirror is as much an agent of change as are any of the people involved – an arbiter in its own right, bringing opponents face to face while mediating opposing interests. But the mirror is only one of many such 'inanimate' agents in this example – along with cameras, placards, uniforms, batons, and so on – that thicken the body politic with things, some more active than others, yet each with "its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination, its ways of bringing together those who are concerned – and even more important, those who are not concerned."[5]

Sure people matter, but so do things. When things come into the picture as players that make a difference in the course of human events, then, according to Bruno Latour, "Realpolitik" intersects with "Dingpolitik."[6] The realm in which people are gathered to debate specific issues on behalf of others, that is, politics as we know it, is brought together with that realm in which specific objects are gathered before people, that is, things as we know and use them. Things are of political relevance and must be foregrounded just as any policy matter might be. Were we to venture "Back to Things!," a new locus of negotiation might be given its due, one that is as much thing-oriented as people-specific and in which both domains are granted equal standing in the deliberation of affairs.[7] *Who* are the people involved? *What* are the matters of concern? *How* do things participate?

To answer such questions in a manner that takes into account an expanded field of agencies would mean to enter a wild topos of diverse actors, each playing their formative role in events both large and small – whether a mirror held up, a public square reformatted, a jailed dissident freed, a president ousted, a territory annexed, troops amassed at a border, planes downed, an aid convoy on a cross-border journey, international agreements signed, or sanctions imposed by world powers. This would bring us to Michel Foucault's more expansive understanding of events themselves as a field of "connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on" – all refracting each other as if scattered in some hall of mirrors.[8] Introducing 'eventalization' as a method of analyzing events in terms of their constituent agents, Foucault places emphasis on the uniqueness and unpredictability of historical instances in place of their more conventional treatment in terms of indisputable, unitary causes. The bottom line: things could have happened differently. When it comes to events, the most important thing "is what happens on the ground."[9] Events are produced by heterogeneous entities that coalesce only to break apart again and reassemble in new alliances. At the moment when a threshold is crossed, a change occurs in the ways that things are done and a new set of norms takes hold. The issue is how events work: the processes they draw together or keep apart, the relations they establish or annul, the practices of people and things they set in motion or resist – all of which, in sum, make events erupt as they do.

What would it mean to read territory with eventalization in mind? Then, too, territory as 'thing' would have to be examined relative to the constituent practices of which it is a product and in which it plays a part. Territory, in this light, could be understood as a double agent; it is made and makes, it is shaped and shapes, it is reactive and active. This dual capacity of territory as product and player foregrounds territory itself as a hybrid of techniques and mindsets. Technical methods in surveying, cartography, navigation, statistics,

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legal systems, military strategies, governance, and so forth converge with various conceptions concerning how the world is viewed and how it is framed to be seen. This means that territory is indeed a political technology – a conjunction of techné and logos – that comes to bear on modes of socio-spatial organization, for better or worse, and mirrors the polymorphous elements, relations, and domains of reference that it assembles.[10]

Holding up a mirror to the world of his time, Ambrogio Lorenzetti set out to capture the very workings of territory when viewed from the vantage of 'good' and 'bad' governance. His frescos in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, painted in the early fourteenth century, belong to the genre of 'how-to' manuals on governing that were then called "'mirrors' or 'eyes' for magistrates."[11] Keeping in line with this genre, Lorenzetti's work is full of illustrated incidents on which the city council should focus its attention in order to better govern the republic. The Sala dei Nove, where the governing body of Siena met to deliberate on state affairs, can be read as a succinct diagram of the interrelations of power and place. The three frescoed walls present an itinerary that progresses from the ills to the virtues of governance and chronicles their effects on the city and countryside. The 'assembly of nine' would sit facing the *The City-State under Tyranny* as an ominous reminder of the evils that would beset a people and their territory if its message were not heeded. Sitting where they were, the magistrates strategically had *The Good City-Republic* on their side. Separating these two scenes is *The Court of the Common Good*, a panel depicting the system of checks and balances at work to assure the proper and equitable distribution of power. The fourth wall of the hall has a window that looks out over the city to the surrounding landscape, as if to supplement the three allegories with a panorama of the world and thereby bring reality into the picture.

Standing before Lorenzetti's encyclopedic account of episodes in a medieval setting, and given a glimpse into the complex ecologies of governance and territory in play at his time, what strikes a contemporary eye most is the sheer multitude of agents drawn together to tell the story and, by extension, just how loaded the body politic is with things – now even more so. In our time, the events that churn this thick amalgam are accelerating and drawing in ever more players, while the conditions produced are becoming normative at an ever-faster rate. We often no longer even know where cities stop or start, let alone which constituencies they actually serve or disown. Whereas we still believe that we have the 'virtues of good government' on our side, we stand face to face with just the opposite and are confronted with a profusion of ills of all sorts – ills that, however detrimental, are all too often cloaked in virtuous guises and go unchecked. How many more mirrors must be held up to bring about true spaces of change? Whatever the answer, the actions taken to assemble a body politic that is more representative of a global constituency of people and things will require deeper forays into the "wilderness of mirrors."[12]

2 **Protesters on the Maidan, or Independence Square, in Kiev holding mirrors at riot police, December 30, 2013** (photo: Konstantin Chernichkin, © Kyiv Post)

3 **'The Hall of Nine' at the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, with the 14th-century frescoes of Ambrogio Lorenzetti that line the hall where the city council formerly convened to deliberate on the matters of the city-republic** (photo: Randolph Starn, 1994)

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1 Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public," in Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe and Cambridge, MA: ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and MIT Press, 2006), p. 16. In the actual quote, Latour uses the expression 'Body Politik', merging English and German terms into a hybrid construct. In reference to versions of the engraved frontispiece for Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan from the mid-17th century, the full quote reads: "But in addition to the visual puzzle of assembling composite bodies, another puzzle should strike us in those engravings. A simple look at them clearly proves that the 'Body Politik' is not only made of people! They are thick with things."

2 Kyiv Post, "Protest of mirrors held to commemorate Nov. 30 police beating of demonstrators," Kyiv Post, December 30, 2013.

3 Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik," p. 15.

For more on the notion of territory viewed as passive background, see Stuart Elden, The Birth of Territory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 6 and 17.

4 Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik," p. 31.

5 Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik," p. 14.

6 Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik," p. 24.

7 Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 76.

8 Foucault, "Questions of Method," p. 83.

9 Foucault, "Questions of Method," p. 77. For the concept of territory as political technology see Elden, The Birth of Territory, p. 17.

10 Randolph Starn, Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p. 31. The frescoes were painted from 1338 to 1339.

11 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Gerontion," originally published in 1920, Collected Poems 1909–1962 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), pp. 29–31.