

Log

WINTER 2014
Observations on
architecture and the
contemporary city

30

37° 00' N, 25° 03' E

Antiparos, Greece

Take a half-day ferry ride southeast out of Athens to Paros, then a short trip across the Amfigeio strait and you will land on Antiparos, a hardscrabble Cycladic island that in 1981 was the unlikely site of a project by Elia Zenghelis, then of the fledgling Office for Metropolitan Architecture. Without the bigness or urban complexity that the firm had up to that point harnessed with vitality in its projects and drawings, the design and placement of 16 villas on the island begged the creation of some sort of fabric from the ground up; the site a blank canvas awaiting its first brushstrokes. In painter Zoe Zenghelis's oil-on-paper rendering of the project, 16 delicate shapes are scattered like confetti across an unearthly ground, barely hinting at the underlying composition by which the villas are arranged. Such a technique of representation led to what the architect today would call an emblematic image: a visual presentation that illustrates "architectural form juxtaposed with programmatic idealism" and "highlights the ideological features without relinquishing the real-life concreteness of a project." The project was not realized, but its image and idea endure.

\$15.00



#hashtag

is rapidly becoming the first letter of your name, your home city, and every retrievable detail of your existence, whether you write it or not. As a keystroke it neither means nor adds anything, and yet the hashtag restructures all language – or what is left of it. Its crossing marks a gathering of scattered strings and phrases to bind and suspend while all else melts into air. Hashtag is the square that keeps reaching – lines run past an empty core, transgress all bounds – a pure remainder drawn by flows. Its emptiness is the very emblem of power and the stage for the rest of history.

After the death of the Sovereign (it is we who killed him), no body, human or divine, could collapse in itself the totality of the state. The Leviathan had been slain, indeed *hashed* to bits. The commonwealth required a new device to bind together the many and the one. As computing progressed, the people found its outer form in an unlikely symbol from medieval cartography: the octothorpe, a village of eight fields around a square.¹ In the ASCII scheme, its inner form assumed a unique string of eight bits, a rhythmic ticking of silent zeroes and voiced ones reading 00100011. Strangely, when tapped out, # is the unmistakable backbeat of rock and roll whirring at inaudible frequencies on mid-century hard disks. #RollOverBeethoven

Invisible substructures encode the hashtag in different ways (35, 23, 43, 00100011, and # for decimal, hexadecimal, octal, binary, and graph), but however you slice it or dice it, it's all SHIFT+3. No matter the language employed, a universal sequence of code places the hashtag third among all printable characters, just after ! and " but before \$ and %. In practice, exclamation and quotation marks typically follow the hashtag rather than precede it, whereas dollar and percent surely bracket it on either end, as social media share prices confirm. While philosophers have long squabbled over the primacy of individual versus the collective, few successfully predicted that the big money was hidden in the artful inventions that could flutter between them. And while octagonal trading pits remain atwitter, most trading today happens

1. Miranda Mote, "Literary Currency," *Incipits* 002 (2013): 1.

WORKAC, PS 216-EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD,
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, 2009-2013.
PHOTOCOPY. IMAGE: THE AUTHOR.

tion through which the copy can
eventually forge its own identity
independent of the original.

Likened to Alvin Lucier's
sound piece "I am Sitting in
a Room," in which Lucier's
own speech is recorded and
rerecorded until it is reduced
to abstract tones, the pattern
represents the point at which the
precision of speech just begins to
fade; it is not yet fully abstracted,
but one can begin to anticipate
the resonances that would be
produced if the process of recopy-
ing were carried out a few dozen
more times. In this liminal state
the pattern is an allusion to the
past, but also to the future: it is a
provocation for further copying,
a challenge to eventually exorcise
any recollection of the original.

— Alfie Koetter

2. Arie Graafland, *Versailles and the*
3. *Mechanics of Power: The Subjugation of Circe. An Essay* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003), 76–77. This effect of geospatial domination was considerably heightened by the mirrors in the Grand Salon, a flat screen of glass upon which the image of reality was continually updated, then the largest of its kind on the globe.
4. Margaret E. Farrar, *Building the Body Politic: Power and Urban Space in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 41.
5. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 17.

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precisely nowhere, dematerialized in sublime exchanges of global currency and bitcoin (where accepted).

How then is the space of power to be constructed? The *paysagiste* Le Nôtre scored the earth with anamorphic cuts to engineer a victory over the horizon for Louis XIV; infinity telescoped within the royal gaze, however briefly.² In the New World, L'Enfant borrowed this same principle to buttress the yet unresolved experiment of self-governance, but in this instance the strategy proved ineffectual and largely symbolic, although suitable for cannon fire.³ Sites of history no longer need such geometric convergence in order to link to all points of reference. In a parallel Copernican revolution, radial networks have lost their centers and now interlace: the hashtag has replaced Versailles. When Claude Lefort proposed that "the locus of power becomes an empty place," he could not have meant anything but this vacant square, even in 1988, a year before Tiananmen.⁴ The truth ineluctably rushed in: Tahrir, Taksim, Occupy. A gridlock of pent-up movement, pounding on the walls and streets and signs, shouting in eight-bit characters.

The hashtag is the suture for that disarticulated corpse, the deleted body named the 99%. It unites us. Like the ubiquitous etiquette of brim-tapping one's fedora in postwar days, we always tag our tweets before they go out in public. It is a sign in the proverbial street that flashes in your breast pocket midstride to cleave all events into before and after. You start running through an intersection, not looking to either side, moving directly toward (or away from) the square. The square image of a crowd photographing itself alights on a screen and captures the first people to drop to the ground as a protester with a firearm hits send. Pixelated and amateur, Walter Benjamin's history of the victors is being rewritten illegitimately, one camera phone at a time – that is, if it can resist total dissolution. Tagging is a delicate art upon which the very persistence of history may depend.

As we turn to gaze back, what vision remains? Tear gas wafts from the cleared-out center. Linear barricades of riot police form its edges. Discarded banners crisscross in multiple directions, their ideologies intersecting across the marked earth, shrouding the dead. The photo is square, the color sepia red. The signal, weak but sufficient. At any rate, the message will generate its own reception. Hashtagged, it finds you, moves through you, animating digits as it ripples across your personal periphery to touch every name, in every city, whether you write it or not.